WESTY MARTIN

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WESTY MARTIN

HE MANAGED TO GET HOLD OF A BRANCH OF A SCRUB OAK.
Westy Martin. *Frontispiece—(Page 34)*

WESTY MARTIN

BY

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS

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WESTY MARTIN

CHAPTER I

A SHOT

A QUICK, sharp report rent the air. Followed several seconds of deathlike silence. Then the lesser sound of a twig falling in the still forest. Again silence. A silence, tense, portentous. Then the sound of foliage being disturbed and of some one running.

Westy Martin paused, every nerve on edge. It was odd that a boy who carried his own rifle slung over his shoulder should experience a kind of panic fear after the first shocking sound of a gunshot. He had many times heard the report of his own gun, but never where it could do harm. Never in the solemn depths of the forest. He did not reach for his gun now to be ready for danger; strangely enough he feared to touch it.

Instead, he stood stark still and looked about. Whatever had happened must have been very near to him. Without moving, for indeed he could not for the moment move a step, he saw a large leaf with a hole through the middle of it. And this hung not ten feet distant. He shuddered at the realization that the whizzing bullet which had made that little hole might as easily have blotted out his young life.

He paused, listening, his heart in his throat. Some one had run away. Had the fugitive seen him? And what had the fugitive done that he should flee at the sight or sound of a human presence?

Suddenly it occurred to Westy that a second shot might lay him low. What if the fugitive, a murderer, had sought concealment at a distance and should try to conceal the one murder with another?

Westy called and his voice sounded strange to him in the silent forest.

"Don't shoot!"

That would warn the unseen gunman unless, indeed, it was his purpose to shoot—to kill.

There was no sound, no answering voice, no pat-

ter of distant footfalls; nothing but the cheery song of a cricket near at hand.

Westy advanced a few steps in the dim, solemn woods, looking to right and left. . . .

CHAPTER II

A PROMISE

WESTY MARTIN was a scout of the first class. He was a member of the First Bridgeboro Troop of Bridgeboro, New Jersey. Notwithstanding that he was a serious boy, he belonged to the Silver Fox Patrol, presided over by Roy Blakeley.

According to Pee-wee Harris of the Raven Patrol, Westy was the only Silver Fox who was not crazy. Yet in one way he was crazy; he was crazy to go out west. He had even saved up a hundred dollars toward a projected trip to the Yellowstone National Park. He did not know exactly when or how he would be able to make this trip alone, but one "saves up" for all sorts of things unplanned. To date, Westy had only the one hundred dollars and the dream of going. When he had saved another hundred, he would begin to develop plans.

"I'll tell you what you do," Westy's father had said to him. "You go up to Uncle Dick's and spend

the summer and help around. You know what Uncle Dick told you; any summer he'd be glad to have you help around the farm and be glad to pay you so much a week. There's your chance, my boy. At Temple Camp you can't earn any money.

"My suggestion is that you pass up Temple Camp this summer and go up on the farm. By next summer maybe you'll have enough to go west, and I'll help you out," he added significantly. "I may even go with you myself and take a look at those geezers or geysers or whatever they call them. I'd kind of half like to get a squint at a grizzly myself."

"Oh, boy!" said Westy.

"I wish I were," said his father.

"Well, I guess I'll do that," said Westy hesitatingly. He liked Temple Camp and the troop, and the independent enterprise proposed by his father was not to be considered without certain lingering regrets.

"It will be sort of like camping—in a way," he said wistfully. "I can take my cooking set and my rifle——"

"I don't think I'd take the rifle if I were you," said Mr. Martin, in the chummy way he had when talking with Westy.

"Jiminies, I'd hate to leave it home," said Westy, a little surprised and disappointed.

"Well, you'll be working up there and won't have much time to use it," said Mr. Martin.

Westy sensed that this was not his father's true reason for objecting to the rifle. The son recalled that his father had been no more than lukewarm when the purchase of the rifle had first been proposed. Mr. Martin did not like rifles. He had observed, as several million other people had observed, that it is always the gun which is not loaded that kills people.

The purchase of the coveted rifle had not closed the matter. The rifle had done no harm, that was the trouble; it had not even killed Mr. Martin's haunting fears.

Westy was straightforward enough to take his father's true meaning and to ignore the one which had been given. It left his father a little chagrined but just the same he liked this straightforwardness in Westy.

"Oh, there'd be time enough to use it up there," Westy said. "And if there wasn't any time, why, then I couldn't use it, that's all. There wouldn't be any harm taking it. I promised you I'd never

shoot at anything but targets and I never have."

"I know you haven't, but up there, why, there are lots of——"

"There's just one thing up there that I'm thinking about," said Westy plainly, "and that's the side of the big barn where I can put a target. That's the only thing I want to shoot at, believe me. And I've got two eyes in my head to see if anybody is around who might get hit. That big, red barn is like—why, it's just like a building in the middle of the Sahara Desert. I don't see why you're still worrying."

"How do you know what's back of the target?" Mr. Martin asked. "How do you know who's inside the barn?"

"If I just tell you I'll be careful, I should think that would be enough," said Westy.

"Well, it is," said Mr. Martin heartily.

"And I'll promise you again so you can be sure."

"I don't want any more promises about your not shooting at anything but targets, my boy," said Mr. Martin. "You gave me your promise a month ago and that's enough. But I want you to promise me again that you'll be careful. Understand?"

"I tell you what I'll do, Dad," said he. "First

I'll see that there's nobody in the barn. Then I'll lock the barn doors. Then I'll get a big sheet of iron that I saw up there and I'll hang it on the side of the barn. Then I'll paste the target against that, see? No bullet could get through that iron and it's about, oh, five times larger than the target."

"Suppose your shot should go wild and hit those old punky boards beyond the edge of the iron sheet?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Good night, you're a scream!" laughed Westy.

Mr. Martin, as usual, was caught by his son's honest, wholesome good-humor.

"I suppose you think I might shoot in the wrong direction and hit one of those grizzlies out in Yellowstone Park," Westy laughed. "Safety first is your middle name all right."

"Well, you go up to Uncle Dick's and don't point your gun out west," said Mr. Martin, "and maybe we can talk your mother into letting us go to Yellowstone next year."

"And will you make *me* a promise?" asked Westy.

"Well, what is it?"

"That you won't worry?"

CHAPTER III

THE PARTING

THE farm on which Westy spent one of the pleasantest summers of his life was about seventy miles from his New Jersey home and the grizzlies in Yellowstone Park were safe. But he thought of that wonderland of the Rockies in his working hours, and especially when he roamed the woods following the trails of little animals or stalking and photographing birds. The only shooting he did on these trips was with his trusty camera.

Sometimes in the cool of the late afternoon, he would try his skill at hitting the bull's eye and after each of these murderous forays against the innocent pasteboard, he would wrap his precious rifle up in its oily cloth and stand it in the corner of his room. No drop of blood was shed by the sturdy scout who had given his promise to be careful and who knew how to be careful.

The only place where he ever went gunning was

in a huge book which reposed on the marble-topped center table in the sitting room of his uncle's farm-house. This book, which abounded in stirring pictures, described the exploits of famous hunters in Africa. The book had been purchased from a loquacious agent and was intended to be ornamental as well as entertaining. It being one of the very few books available on the farm, Westy made it a sort of constant companion, sitting before it each night under the smelly hanging lamp and spending hours in the African jungle with man-eating lions and tigers.

We are not to take note of Westy's pleasant summer at this farm, for it is with the altogether extraordinary event which terminated his holiday that our story begins. His uncle had given him eight dollars a week, which with what he had brought from home made a total of something over a hundred dollars which he had when he was ready to start home. This he intended to add to his Yellowstone Park fund when he reached Bridgeboro.

He felt very rich and a little nervous with a hundred dollars or more in his possession. But it was not for that reason that he carried his rifle on the day he started for home. He carried it be-

cause it was his most treasured possession, excepting his hundred dollars. He told his aunt and uncle, and he told himself, that he carried it because it could not easily be put in his trunk except by jamming it in cornerwise. But the main reason he carried it was because he loved it and he just wanted to have it with him.

He might have caught a train on the branch line at Dawson's which was the nearest station to his uncle's farm. He would then have to change to the main line at Chandler. He decided to send his trunk from Dawson's and to hike through the woods to Chandler some three or four miles distant. His aunt and uncle and Ira, the farm hand, stood on the old-fashioned porch to bid him good-by.

And in that moment of parting, Aunt Mira was struck with a thought which may perhaps appeal to you who have read of Westy and have a certain slight acquaintance with him. It was the thought of how she had enjoyed his helpful visit and how she would miss him now that he was going. Pee-wee Harris, with all his startling originality, would have wearied her perhaps. Two weeks of Roy Blakeley's continuous nonsense would have been enough for this quiet old lady.

There was nothing in particular about Westy; he was just a wholesome, well-balanced boy. She had not wearied of him. The scouts of his troop never wearied of him—and never made a hero of him. He was just Westy. But there was a gaping void at Temple Camp that summer because he was not there. And there was going to be a gaping void in this quiet household on the farm after he had gone away. That was always the way it was with Westy, he never witnessed his own triumphs because his triumphs occurred in his absence. He was sadly missed, but how could he see this?

He looked natty enough in his negligee khaki attire with his rifle slung over his shoulder.

"We're jes going to miss you a right good lot," said his aunt with affectionate vehemence, "and don't forget you're going to come up and see us in the winter."

"I want to," said Westy.

Ira, the farm hand, was seated on the carriage step smoking an atrocious pipe which he removed from his mouth long enough to bid Westy good-by in his humorous drawling way. The two had been great friends.

"I reckon you'd like to get a bead on a nice, big,

hissin' wildcat with that gol blamed toy, wouldn' yer now, huh?"

"You go 'long with you," said Aunt Mira, "he wouldn' nothing of the kind."

Westy smiled good-naturedly.

"Wouldn' yer now, huh?" persisted Ira. "I seed 'im readin' 'baout them hunters in Africa droppin' lions an' tigers an' what all. I bet ye'd like to get *one—good—plunk* at a wildcat now, wouldn' yer? *Kerplunk,* jes like that, hey? Then ye'd feel like a reg'lar Teddy Roosevelt, huh?" Ira accompanied this intentionally tempting banter with a demonstration of aiming and firing.

Westy laughed. "I wouldn't mind being like Roosevelt," he said.

"Yer couldn' drop an elephant at six yards," laughed Ira.

"Well, I guess I won't meet any elephants in the woods between here and Chandler," Westy said.

"Don't you put no sech ideas in his head," said Aunt Mira, as she embraced her nephew affectionately.

Then he was gone.

"I don't see why you want ter be always pesterin' the poor boy," complained Aunt Mira, as Ira lowered

his lanky legs to the ground preparatory to standing on them. He *had* been a sort of evil genius all summer, beguiling Westy with enticing pictures of all sorts of perilous exploits out of his own abounding experiences on land and sea. "You'd like to've had him runnin' away to sea with your yarns of whalin' and shipwrecks," Aunt Mira continued. "And it's jes a parcel of lies, Ira Hasbrook, and you know it as well as I do. Like enough he'll shoot at a woodchuck or a skunk and kill one of Atwood's cows. They're always gettin' into the woods."

"No, he won't neither," said her husband.

"I say like enough he might," persisted Aunt Mira. "Weren't he crazy 'baout that book?"

"I didn' write the book," drawled Ira.

"No, but you told him how to skin a bear."

"That's better'n bein' a book agent and skinnin' a farmer," drawled Ira.

"It's 'baout the only thing you didn't tell him you was," Aunt Mira retorted.

Acknowledging which, Ira puffed at his pipe leisurely and contemplated Aunt Mira with a whimsical air.

"I meant jes what I said, Ira Hasbrook," said she.

"The kid's all right," said Ira. "He couldn' hit nuthin further'n ten feet. But he's all right jes the same. We're goin' ter miss him, huh, Auntie?"

But they did not miss him for long, for they were destined to see him again before the day was over.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUFFERER

In truth, if this were a narrative of Ira Hasbrook's adventures, it might be thought lively reading of the dime novel variety. He had not, as he had confided to Westy, limited his killing exploits to swatting flies.

He was one of those universal characters who have a way of drifting finally to farms. And he had not abridged his tales of sprightly adventure in imparting them to Westy. He had been to sea on a New Bedford whaler. He had shot big game in the Rockies. He had lived on a ranch. His star performance had been a liberal participation in the kidnaping of a despotic king in a small South Sea island.

Naturally, so lively an adventurer had nothing but contempt for a pasteboard target. And though he did not wilfully undertake to alienate Westy from his code of conduct, he had so continually

represented to him the thrilling glories of the chase, that Aunt Mira had very naturally suffered some haunting apprehensions that her nephew might depart impulsively on some piratical cruise or Indian killing enterprise.

These vague fears had simmered down at the last to the ludicrous dread that her departing nephew (whom she had come to know and love) might, under the inspiration of the satanic Ira, celebrate his departure from the country by laying low some innocent cow in attempting to "drop" an undesirable woodchuck. She had come to have a very horror of the word *drop* which occurred so frequently in Ira's tales of adventure. . . .

But Aunt Mira's fears were needless. Westy had been Ira's companion without being his disciple. In his quiet way he had understood Ira thoroughly, the same as in his quiet way he understood Roy Blakeley and Pee-wee Harris thoroughly. The cows, even the woodchucks, were safe. The shot which turned the tide of Westy Martin's life was not out of his own precious rifle.

He had not taken many steps after hearing the shot when he came upon the effect of it. A small

deer lay a few feet off the trail. The beautiful creature was quite motionless and though it lay prone on its side with the head flat upon the ground, its gracefulness was apparent, even striking. It lay in a sort of bower of low hanging foliage and had a certain harmony with the forest which even its stricken state and somewhat unnatural attitude could not destroy.

As Westy first glimpsed this silent, uncomplaining victim, a feeling (which could hardly be called a thought) came to him. It was just this, that the cruelty which had wrought this piteous spectacle was doubly cruel for that the creature had been laid low in its own home. The friendly, enveloping foliage revealed this helpless denizen of the woods as a sorrowing mother might show her dead child to a sympathizing friend. Such thoughts did not take form in the mind of the tremulous boy but he had some such feeling. He was thoughtful enough, even at the moment, to wonder how he could have taken such delight in stories of wholesale killings. One sight of the actual thing aroused his anger and pity.

He approached a little nearer, this scout with a rifle over his shoulder, and beheld something which

startled, almost unnerved him. He could see only one of the eyes, for the deer lay on its side, but this eye was soft and seemed not unfriendly; it was not a startled eye. The beautiful animal was not dead. He did not know how much it might be suffering, but at all events its suffering was not over, and there was a kind of resignation in the soft look of that single eye; just a kind of silent acceptance of its plight which went to the boy's heart.

Who had done this thing, against the good law of the state, and in disregard of every humane obligation? Who had fled leaving this beautiful inhabitant of the quiet woods in agony? The leaves stirred gently above it in the soothing breeze. A gay little bird chirped a melody in the overhanging branches as if to beguile it in its suffering. And the soft, gentle eye seemed full of an infinite patience as it looked at Westy.

He was face to face with one of the sporting exploits of that horrible toy, the rifle. For just a moment it seemed as if the stricken deer were looking at his own rifle as if in quiet curiosity. Then he noticed a tiny wound and a little trickle of blood on the creature's side. It made a striking contrast, the crimson and the dull gray. . . .

CHAPTER V

A PLAIN DUTY

. . . And the great hunter crouching behind the rock brought his trusty rifle to bear upon the distant stag. The keen-eyed marksman looked like a statue as he knelt, waiting.

Westy recalled these words in the mammoth volume on the sitting room table at the farm. He had admired, even been thrilled at the heroic picture of the great hunter whose exploits in the Maine woods were so flatteringly recorded. It had not at the time occurred to him that the noble stag might have looked like a statue too. Well, here was the actual result of such flaunted heroism, and Westy did not like it. It was quite a different sort of picture.

Then, suddenly, it occurred to him that he was to blame for this pitiful spectacle. He who shoots does not always kill. But he who shoots intends to kill. If the fugitive had failed of his purpose it was because he had been frightened at the sound of

some one near at hand. The shooting season was not on, it had been a stolen, lawless shot.

A feeling of anger, even of hate, was aroused in Westy's mind, against the ruthless violator of the law who had been forced to save himself by flight before his lawless deed was completed. He had probably thought the footfalls those of a game warden. To shoot game out of season was bad enough as it seemed to the scout. To shoot living things seemed now bereft of all glory to the sensitive boy. But to shoot and not kill and then run away seemed horrible. This poor deer might suffer for hours.

Westy had seen a little demonstration of the kind of thing he had been reading and hearing about. Through the medium of the alluring printed page, he had been present at buffalo hunts, he had seen kindly, intelligent elephants laid low, and here he was seething with rage that the blood of this harmless, beauteous creature had been shed, and shed to no purpose.

But Westy was more than a sensitive boy, he was a scout. And a scout has ever a sense of responsibility. It was futile to consider what some stranger had done while this poor creature lay suffering.

All that he had read and heard about hunting big game and all such stuff was forgotten in the consciousness of a present duty. He, Westy Martin, must put this deer out of its suffering; he must kill it.

The owner of the precious rifle, all shiny and oily, shuddered. He, scout of the first class, must finish the work which some criminal wretch had begun.

He was too essentially honest to take refuge in his promise not to shoot at anything but a target. He had a momentary thought of that, and then was ashamed of it. Phrases familiar to him ran through his head. Serious boy that he was, he had always been a reader of the Handbook. *A scout is helpful. A scout is friendly to all. . . . A scout is kind. He is a friend to animals. He will not kill nor hurt. . . .*

Yet he was not friendly to all. He was enraged at the absent destroyer, who had made it necessary for him to do something he could not bear to do. He wished that Ira were there to do it instead. He who had admired the great hunter crouching behind a rock, wished now that the mighty hunter might be present to attend to this miserable business. He had never dreamed of such an emergency, of such

a duty. He wished that one or other of the sprightly youngsters in the advertisements, who were so ready with their firearms, might shoot for once in this humane cause.

Poor Westy, he was just a boy after all. . . .

CHAPTER VI

FIRST AID—LAST AID

He never in all his life felt so nervous, and so much like a criminal, as when he reached with trembling hand for the innocent rifle with which he was to shed more crimson blood and destroy a life. He looked guiltily at the deer whose eye seemed to hold him in a kind of gentle stare. It seemed as if the creature trusted him, yet wondered what he was going to do.

There was a kind of pathos in the thought that came to him that the suffering deer did not recognize the rifle as the sort of thing which had laid him low. The creature's innocence, as one might say, went to the boy's heart.

He backed away from the stricken form, three yards—five yards. He felt brutal, abominable. The cautious little bird had withdrawn to a tree somewhat farther off where it still sang blithely. Westy paused, listening to the bird. Then he stole

toward the tree trying to deceive himself that he wanted to see what kind of a bird it was, when in plain fact all he was doing was killing time. The bird, disgusted with the whole affair as one might have fancied, made a great flutter and flew away to a more wholesome atmosphere. The bird was not a scout, it had no duties. . . .

Westy advanced a few paces, his rifle shaking in his hand. It was simple enough what he had to do, yet there he was absurdly calculating distances. Oh, if it had only been the white target there before him with its black circles one inside another, the only hunting ground or jungle Westy knew. Strange, how different he felt now.

He could not bear that soft eye contemplating him so he walked around to the other side of the deer where the eye could not see him. Then he felt sneaky, like one stealing up behind his victim. And through all his immature trepidation hate was in his heart; hate for the brutal wretch who had fled thinking only of his own safety, and leaving this ungrateful task for him to do.

Suddenly it occurred to Westy that he might run to Chandler and tell the authorities what he had found. That would be his good turn for the day.

Ira had always "guyed" him about good turns. That would seem like running away from an unpleasant duty. To whom did he owe the good turn? Was it not to this stricken, suffering creature?

So Westy Martin, scout of the first class, did his good turn to this dumb creature in its dim forest home. The dumb creature did not know that Westy Martin was doing it a good turn. It seemed a queer sort of good turn. He could never write it down in his neat little scout record as a good turn. He would never, *never* think of it in that way. If the deer could only understand. . . .

The way to do a thing is to do it. And it is not the part of a scout to dilly-dally. When a scout knows his duty he is not afraid. But if the deer could only know, could only understand. . . .

Westy approached the creature with bolstered resolution. He lifted his gun, his arms shaking. Where should it be? In the head? Of course. He held the muzzle within six inches of the head. A jerky little squirrel crept part way down a tree, turned suddenly and scurried up again. It was very quiet about. Only the sound of a busy woodpecker tapping away somewhere. Westy paused for a moment, counting the taps. . . .

Then there was another sound; quick, sharp, which did not belong in the woods. And the woodpecker stopped his tapping. Westy saw the deer's forefoot twitch spasmodically. And a little stream of blood was trailing down its forehead.

Westy Martin had done his daily good turn. . . .

CHAPTER VII

LITTLE DROPS OF WATER

THE feeling now uppermost in Westy's mind was that of anger at the unknown person who had made it necessary for him to do what he had done. He felt that he had been cheated out of keeping his promise about shooting. He knew perfectly well that what he had done was right and that only technically had he broken his promise to his father. But he had done something altogether repugnant to him and it turned him against guns not only, but particularly against the sneak whose lawless work he had had to complete.

It must be confessed that it was not mainly the fugitive's lawlessness or even his cruel heedlessness that aroused Westy. It was the feeling that somehow this work of murder (for so he thought it) had been wished on him. It had agitated him and gone against him, and he was enraged over it.

He had not been quite the ideal scout in the matter of readiness to kill the deer; he might have done that job more promptly and with less perturbation. But he was quite the scout in his towering resolve to track down the culprit and tell him what he thought of him and bring him to justice.

It was characteristic of Westy, who was a fiend at tracking and trailing, that this course of action appealed to him now, rather than the tamer course of going direct to the authorities. There was something very straightforward about Westy. And besides, he had the adventurous spirit which prefers to act without coöperation.

"*By jumping jiminies.* I'll find that fellow!" he said aloud. "I should worry about catching the train. I'll find him all right, and I'll tell him something he won't forget in a hurry—I will. I'll track him and find out who he is. Maybe after he's paid a hundred dollars fine, he won't be so free with his blamed rifle."

It was odd how he had balked at putting an end to the wounded deer, and then had not the slightest hesitancy to pursue, he knew not what sort of disreputable character, and denounce him to his face

and then report him. Westy would not show up with the authorities, not he; not till he had first called the marauder a few names which he was already deciding upon. They were not the sort of names that are used in the language of compliment. It is not to be supposed that Westy was perfect. . . .

He was all scout now. Yet he was puzzled as to which way to turn. It is sometimes easier to follow tracks than to find them. No doubt the fugitive had been some distance from the deer when he had shot it. Where had he been then? Near enough for Westy to hear the patter of his footfalls, that was certain. Also another thought occurred to him. The man's shot had not been a good one, at least it had not proved fatal. He was either a very poor marksman or else he had fired from a considerable distance.

Westy's mind worked quickly and logically now. He had easily the best mind of any scout in his troop. Not the most sprightly mind, but the best. He tried hurriedly to determine where the man had stood by considering the position of the wound on the deer's body. But he quickly saw the fallacy of any deduction drawn from this sign since the deer

might have turned before he dropped. Then another thought, a better one, occurred to him. The animal had been shot below its side, almost in its belly. Might not that argue that the huntsman had been somewhat below the level of the deer?

The conformation of the land thereabouts seemed to give color to this surmise. The ground sloped so that it might almost be said to be a hillside which descended to the verge of a gully. Westy went in that direction for a few yards and came to the gully. He scrambled down into it and found himself involved in a tangle of underbrush. But he saw that from this trenchlike concealment, the animal might easily have been struck in the spot where the wound was.

His deduction was somewhat confirmed by his recollection that it was from this direction he had heard the receding footfalls. A path led through this miniature jungle and up the other side where the pine needles made a smooth floor in the forest.

Presently all need of nice deducing was rendered superfluous by a sign likely to prove a jarring and discordant note in the woodland studies of any scout. This was a crumpled tinfoil package which on being

pulled to its original size revealed the romantic words so replete with the spirit of the silent woods:

MECHANIC'S DELIGHT
PLUG CUT TOBACCO

The tinfoil package was empty and destined to delight no more. But it was not even wet, and had not been wet, and had evidently been thrown away but lately.

It was immediately after throwing this away that Westy noticed something else which interested him. It was nothing much, but bred as he was to observe trifling things in the woods, it made him curious. The rank undergrowth near him was besprinkled with drops as if it had been rained on. This was noticeable on the large, low-spreading plantain leaves near by. Surely in the bright sunshine of the morning any recent drops of dew or rain must have dried up. Yet there were the big flat leaves besprinkled with drops of water.

Westy remembered something his scoutmaster had once said. *Everything that happens has a cause. Little things may mean big things.* Nine boys out of ten would not have noticed this trivial thing, or

having noticed it would not have thought twice about it. But Westy approached and felt of the leaves and as he did so, he felt his foot sinking into swampy water. He tried to lift it out but could not. Then, he felt the other foot sinking too. He hardly knew how it happened, but in ten seconds he was down to his knees in the swamp. Frantically he grasped the swampy weeds but they gave way. He could not lift either foot now. He felt himself going down, down. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

BARRETT'S

So this was to be the end; he would be swallowed up and no one would know what had become of him. The silent, treacherous marsh would consume him. He was in its jaws and it would devour him and the world would never know. Nature, the quiet woods that he had loved, would do this frightful thing.

Then he ceased to sink. He was in above his knees. One foot rested on something hard. But it was not that which supported him. The marshy growth below held him up. He was not in peril but he had suffered a shocking fright. He managed to get hold of a crooked branch of scrub oak which overhung the gully and drew himself up. It was hard to do this for the suction kept him down. It was evidently a little marshy pool concealed by undergrowth that he had stepped into.

For no particular reason, he purposely got one

foot under the submerged thing it had descended upon. He thought it was a stick. It came up slantingways till with one hand he was able to get hold of it. It was hard and cold. For this reason, he was curious about it and he kept hold of it with one hand while he scrambled clear of the tiny morass. It was dripping with mud and green slime. But he knew what he was holding long before it was clear of its slimy, green disguise. *It was a rifle.*

Then Westy knew the explanation of the wetness on the leaves. The rifle had not been there long. It had probably been thrown there in panic haste and the water had splashed up onto the low, dank growth which concealed the frightful hole. The gun would never have been found but for Westy's observant eye and consequent mishap.

He wiped the dripping slime from the rifle and examined his find. The gun was old and had evidently seen much service. On the smooth-worn butt of it was something which interested him greatly and seemed likely to prove more helpful than any footprints he might hope to find. This was the name *Luke Meadows,* evidently burnt in with a pointed tool, possibly a nail. Printed in another direction on the rifle butt, so that it might

or might not have borne relation to the name, were the letters very crudely inscribed *Cody Wg.*

Even in his surprise, Westy recognized a certain appropriateness in the word *Cody* burnt into a rifle butt; it seemed a fitting enough place on which to perpetuate the true name of Buffalo Bill. At the time he could not conjecture what the letters *Wg* stood for. But it seemed likely enough that Luke Meadows was the name of the owner of the rifle.

The gun had certainly not been in the swamp long for no rust was upon it. He believed that the owner of it, fearing to be overtaken with it in his possession, had flung it into the little swamp before fleeing.

He was not so intent now on finding footprints. Surely the person who had hidden the gun was the culprit, and it seemed a reasonable enough inference that he belonged in the neighborhood. The quest seemed greatly simplified; so simplified that Westy began formulating what he would say to the marauder. Of one thing he was resolved, and that was that the man should pay the penalty of his lawlessness.

Westy did not burden himself with two guns; he hid the one he had found in the bushes, then bent his

course eastward through the woods. If he had been going straight to Chandler to catch the train, he would have cut through the woods southeast, emerging at the edge of the town. But he changed his course now and went directly east because he wanted to reach the little settlement known as Barrett's. This was on the road which bordered the woods to the east and ran south into Chandler.

Westy would not exactly be going out of his way, he would simply be losing the advantage of a short cut. Barrett's was the nearest and seemed the likeliest place from which one given to illicit hunting would come. At Barrett's he would inquire for Luke Meadows.

The name on the rifle saved him the difficulties and delays of tracking. For with the culprit's name, Westy felt that he could easily be found.

In about fifteen minutes, he emerged from the woods at Barrett's. He had been there before, but one sight of the place now made him glad that he had not brought the telltale rifle with him. He felt that if he had, Meadows or Meadows' cronies might relieve him of it and put an end to its availability as evidence. It was safe where it was. . . .

Barrett's was one of those places that grow up

around a factory and subsist on the factory. Sometimes quite pretentious little villages grow up in this way and attain finally to the dignity of "GO SLOW" signs and traffic cops. But in this case the factory having put Barrett's on the county map closed up its door and left Barrett's sprawling. There was a settlement and no factory to support it.

When the Barrett Leather Goods Company stopped making leather goods, a couple of dozen men and as many more girls were thrown out of employment. With the leather goods factory closed there was nothing for the working people of Barrett's to do but move away or subsist as best they could by hook or crook. The better sort among the inhabitants moved away. Those that remained soon became a dubious set whose professional activities were, at the least, shady.

Barrett's was a sort of hobo among villages, an ill-kept, prideless, lawless place, having all the characteristics of a shiftless man who had gone to the bad. The countryside shunned it. And it was not considered a safe place for the youth of the surrounding villages, especially at night. Every now and then, some one from Barrett's was taken to Chandler and thence sent to jail. . . .

CHAPTER IX

ON THE TRAIL

BARRETT'S was not accustomed to visits from nattily attired boy scouts with rifles slung over their shoulders and the lolling youths of the settlement stared at him and commented audibly as he passed.

"Hey, what's that you got over your shoulder?" one of them called.

"That, oh, that's a soup spoon," said Westy, quite unperturbed. "Do you know where Luke Meadows lives?"

"What d'yer want 'im fer?" one of the natives asked.

"Oh, I just wanted to see him," said Westy.

"Whatcher want ter see 'im fer?"

"Oh, just for fun. Do you know where he lives?"

"He lives in that white house up the road," said a rather more accommodating boy. "Do you see the house with the winder broken? The one with

the chimney gone? He lives there, only he ain't home."

"He is too," contradicted another informer. "I seen him go in his back door half an hour ago; he come around through the fields from the woods."

"Thanks," said Westy.

If Luke Meadows lived in the house indicated and had indeed returned home through the fields, then he must have emerged from the woods at a considerable distance from his home, an unnecessary thing to do except upon the theory that he wished to throw some one off his track, or at least avoid being seen. Westy thought he could sense the position in which this man stood toward the game wardens of the county. He thought it likely that there had been previous encounters between them. Hunting game out of season is a pursuit which is pretty apt to be chronic.

Now that Westy was about to encounter this man, he felt just a little trepidation. Perhaps it would have been better to go to Chandler first. But then the matter would have been out of his hands. He wished first to tell this man a thing or two which scouts know. . . .

As he went along the narrow, dusty road, his

uneasiness increased. He was not exactly afraid but he was beginning to balk a little at the prospect of denouncing a person who was probably many years his senior.

The little houses along the road, which must have been hopelessly unsightly from the beginning, had fallen into a state of disrepair and squalor which seemed in striking discord with the surrounding countryside. A slum in the city is bad enough; in the fair country it is shockingly grotesque.

These little houses were double, each holding two families, and some of them were in blocks of three or four. They seemed to nestle under the shadow of the big wooden factory back in the field. Every window of the big factory was broken and a more forlorn picture of disuse and dilapidation could scarcely be imagined. From this factory a rusty railroad track disappeared into the woods; it had probably once joined the main line at Chandler.

Beyond these little rows of cheap frame houses was one which stood by itself. Its chimney was indeed gone and its window broken, but at least it stood by itself, was of a different color and architecture from the others, and had, in its shabby way, a character of its own. A little girl was swinging

on the fence gate, or would have been swinging if the hinges had not been broken. A dried and curling woodchuck skin was nailed to the clapboards beside the door, a dubious hint of the predilections of the householder.

CHAPTER X

LUKE MEADOWS

"Does Luke Meadows live here?" Westy asked.

"Yes, sirrr," said the little girl with a strong roll of her r's.

"Could I see him?"

"I reckon you can," said the little girl, then without going to the trouble of entering the house, she called, "Dad, thar's a boy wants to see you."

These were the first samples Westy had of that characteristic way of saying *reckon* and *thar* which he had soon to associate with new friends in a free, vast, far-off region. It occurred to him that if Meadows wished to lie low, as the saying is, it might go hard with the little girl who was so ready to admit his presence to a stranger.

The appearance and reputation of Barrett's, as well as the unlawful shooting, had conjured up a picture in Westy's mind which had made him apprehensive about his reception. And now he felt that

the little girl might also feel something of the hunter's displeasure.

His kindly fear for her was quite superfluous, for presently there appeared from within the house a youngish man who absently, as it seemed, placed his arm around the child's shoulder and drew her toward him as he waited for Westy to make his business known.

The man was tall and raw-boned and wore nothing but queer-looking moccasins, corduroy trousers and a gray flannel shirt. His cheek-bones were high and he was as brown as a mulatto. What caught Westy and somewhat disconcerted him, was the stranger's eyes, which were gray and of a clearness and keenness which he had never seen in the eyes of any human being before. They were the eyes of the forest and the plains, the eyes that see and read and understand where others see not. The eyes that speak of silent and lonely places and bespeak a competence which only rugged nature can impart. Such eyes Daniel Boone may have had.

At all events, they disconcerted Westy and knocked the beginning of his fine speech clean out of his head. The man was calm and patient, the little girl wriggled playfully in his strong hold, and

Westy stood like a fool and said nothing. Then he found himself.

"Are you Lu—— Are you Mr. Luke Meadows?" he asked.

"Reckon I am," drawled the man.

"Well, then," said Westy, gathering courage, "I came to tell you that I know what you did in the woods because I—because I was the one that was there—I was the one that shouted."

"Yer seed me, youngster?" the man drawled, not angrily.

"No, I didn't see you," said Westy, "but gee, you don't have to see a person to find them out. You shot a deer and you know as well as I do it isn't the season. And then you hid your gun—I guess you thought I was a game warden or something. But I found it, I'll tell you that much and I saw your name on it.

"Do you know what you made me do?" he added, becoming vehement as his anger gave him courage. "You made me kill a deer, that's what you made me do! You made me kill a deer after I promised I'd never shoot at anything but a target —that's what you made me do," he shouted in boyish anger. "You didn't even kill it, you didn't!

Now you see what you did, sneaking and shooting game out of season! Now you see what you made me do!"

There was something so naïve and boyish in putting the injury on personal grounds that even Meadows could not repress a smile.

"I made a promise to my father, that's what I did," said Westy indignantly.

The man neither confessed nor denied his guilt. It seemed strange to Westy that he did not deny it since criminals always protest their innocence. At the moment the man's chief concern seemed to be a certain interest in Westy. He just stood listening, the while holding the little girl close to him and playfully ruffling her hair. Perhaps his dubious standing with the authorities made him lukewarm about protestations of innocence.

"Waal?" was all he said.

"And you're not going to get away with it either," said Westy.

Meadows drew a tinfoil package from his trousers pocket, took some tobacco from it and replaced the package in his pocket. Westy saw that the package was a new one and that it bore the MECHANIC'S DELIGHT label.

"You left the other package in the woods," Westy said triumphantly, "and that's how I happened to find your gun."

"Yer left the gun thar, youngster?"

"Yes, I did," said Westy angrily, "and I know where it is all right." Then the true Westy Martin got in a few words. "The only reason I came here first," he said, "was because I didn't want to seem sneaky. I didn't want you to think that I had to go and get the—the constables or sheriffs—I didn't want you to think I was afraid to face you alone. I didn't want to go and tell on you till I saw you first, that's all."

"Waal, naow yer see me," drawled Meadows.

"And I'm going to do what I ought to do, no matter what," Westy flared up.

"S'posin' yer run an' play," said Meadows to the little girl. Then, as she moved away. "An' what might yer ought ter do?" he asked quietly.

"You admit you shot that deer?" Westy asked. "Jiminies, you can't deny it," he added boyishly.

"Waal?" said Meadows.

"Do you see this badge?" said Westy, pulling the sleeve of his scout shirt around so as to display the several merit badges that were sewn there. "That

top one," he said in a boyish tone of mingled pride and anger, "is a conservation badge; it's a scout badge."

"Yer one of them scaouts, huh?"

"Yes, I am and I won that badge. It means if I know of anybody breaking the game laws, I've got to report it, that's what it means. I've got to do it even if it seems mean——"

"Seems mean, huh?"

"No, it doesn't," Westy forced himself to say. "Because what right did you have to do that? Gee, I don't say you wanted to leave the deer suffering, I don't say that." He had been fully prepared to charge the offender with that but now that he was face to face with him, he found it hard to do so. He put the whole responsibility for his purpose on his conservation badge, in which Meadows seemed rather interested.

"What's that thar next one?" he asked.

"That's the pathfinder's badge," said Westy.

"Yer a pathfinder, huh?"

"Yes, I am," said Westy, "but I guess maybe I'm not as good at it as you are. But anyway, if you know all about those things—shooting and the woods and all that—jiminies, you ought to know

"WELL, LUKE, AT IT AGAIN, HEY?" SAID THE GAME WARDEN.

Westy Martin.

enough not to shoot game out of season. Maybe that deer was a very young one, or maybe——"

"Haow 'baout my young un?" Meadows asked calmly. "How 'baout that li'l gal yer seed?"

"Well, what about her?" demanded Westy angrily.

CHAPTER XI

WESTY MARTIN, SCOUT

"WHAT makes yer say maybe I'm good at that sort of thing?" asked Luke Meadows.

"I don't know," said Westy; "just sort of you seem that way. But anyway, that hasn't got anything to do with what *I* have to do, has it? I got that merit badge by passing six tests, if anybody should ask you. And the last one of those tests is doing something that helps enforce the game laws, and you can bet I'm going to keep on doing that too. You'll have to pay a fine, that's what you'll have to do, and it serves you right."

"Yer goin' ter tell 'em in Chandler haow yer found my gun near the spot?"

"Yes, I am and it serves you right," said Westy. "You broke the law and you made me shoot—— Do you think it was fun for me to do that?" he flared up angrily.

"Waal, I reckon that'll be enough fer 'em," said

Meadows. "It'll cook my goose. They've got the knife in me, as you easterners say."

He sat down on the top step of his miserable home and seemed to meditate. "Mis Ellis over yonder, I reckon she'll look out fer the kid," he said. "'Tain't been nuthin but carnsarned trouble ever sence we come from Cody. If I could get one —*jes one*—good aim—*jes—one—good—shot*—at the man that told me ter come east and work in that thar busted up factory! The wife, she worked in it till she got the flu last winter and died. And here we are, me 'n' the kid—stranded like play-actin' folk. I can't shoot them factory people nor that thar loon I run into in Cody, so I get off in the woods 'n' shoot. Yer can get ten dollars fer a deer-skin if yer kin get through without them game sharks catchin' yer. Yer a pretty likely sort o' youngster, yer are. Never had that thar flu, did yer?"

He said no more, only sat with his hands on his knees, occasionally spitting. And for a few moments there was silence.

"Is Cody a town?" Westy asked.

"In Wyoming," Meadows answered.

And again there was silence.

"That's where Yellowstone Park is," said Westy.

"'Baout thirty or forty mile," said Meadows.

"That's where I'm going to go," said Westy.

Still again there was silence, and Westy felt uncomfortable. He felt that he would like to know a little more about this man. And that was strange seeing that he was going to Chandler to report him. It seemed odd that Meadows did not threaten or try to dissuade him.

Then, suddenly the whole matter was roughly taken out of Westy's hands. Two men, with a leashed dog, came diagonally across the road. They had evidently come out of the woods and their importance and purpose were manifested by the group representing Barrett's younger set which followed them in great excitement, running to keep up and be prompt upon the scene. There was no mistaking the air of vigorous assurance which the men bore. But if this were not enough the badge upon the shirt of one of them left no doubt of his official character. It was this one who held the dog and the tired beast was panting audibly.

"Well, Luke, at it again, hey?" said the game warden, in that counterfeit tone of sociability which police officials acquire.

"H'lo, Terry," drawled Luke, not angrily.

Surrounding the two men stood the gaping throng of curious boys. One or two slatternly women gave color to the scene. Somewhat apart from the group, a frightened, pitiful little figure, stood the child, Luke's daughter.

"You run over to Mis Ellis'," Luke said to her. But the little girl did not run over to Mrs. Ellis. She just stood apart, staring with a kind of instinctive apprehension.

"Well, Luke," said the game warden, "seems like you got some explainin' to do this time. What was you doin' in the woods? Killin' another deer, hey? When was you goin' back to get him, Luke? Better get your hat, Luke, and come along with us. Farmer Sands here seen you comin' out through the back fields——"

Then the little girl interrupted the game warden's talk by rushing pell-mell to her father. Luke put his big, brown hand about her and then Westy noticed that his forearm was tattooed with the figure of a buffalo.

"You run along over t' Missie Ellis," said Luke, "and she'll show yer them pictur' books; you run like——"

Here he arose, slowly, deliberately, as if with the

one action to dismiss her and place himself in the hands of the law. Then, suddenly, he lifted her up and kissed her. In all the long time that Westy was destined to know Luke Meadows, this was the only occasion on which he was ever to see him act on impulse.

But Westy Martin's impulse was still quicker. Before the little child was down upon the ground again he spoke, and his own voice sounded strange to him as he saw the gaping loiterers all about, and the astonished gaze of Terry, the game warden. In the boy's trousers pocket (which is the safe deposit vault pocket with boys) his sweaty palm clutched the hundred and three dollars which he was taking home to save for his trip to the Yellowstone He had kept one hand about it almost ever since he left the farm, till his very hand smelled like the roll of bills. But he clutched it even more tightly now. His voice was not as sure as that unseen clutch.

"If you're hunting for the fellow who killed the deer over in the woods," he said, "then here I am. I'm the one that killed the deer and—and if—if you're going to take—arrest—anybody you'd better arrest me—because I'm the one that did it. I killed the deer—I admit it. So you better arrest me."

For a few seconds no one spoke. Then, and it seems odd when you come to think of it, the dog pulled the leash clean out of Terry the game warden's hand, and began climbing up on Westy and licking his hand. . . .

CHAPTER XII

GUILTY

He took his stand upon the simple confession that it was he who had killed the deer. He knew that he could not say more without saying too much. And all the king's horses and all the king's men could not make him say more. Fortunately, he did not have to say more, or much more, because Farmer Sands availed himself of the occasion to preach a homily on the evil of boys carrying firearms.

"Who you be, anyways?" he demanded shrewdly.

Westy's one fear was that Luke would speak and spoil everything. For a moment, he seemed on the point of speaking. Probably it was only the sight of his little daughter that deterred him from doing so. It was a moment fraught with peril to Westy's act. Then, it was too late for Luke to speak and Westy was glad of that.

He was on his way to Chandler between the game warden and the farmer.

"Well, who you be, anyways?" Farmer Sands repeated.

It was Terry, the game warden, who answered him across Westy's shoulder.

"Why, Ezrie, he's jus' one of them wild west shootin', Indian huntin', dime novel readin' youngsters what oughter have some sense flogged inter him. I'd as soon give a boy of mine rat poison to play with as one of these here pesky rifles. It's a wonder he hit him, but that's the way fools allus do. What's your name, kid? You don't b'long round here?"

Westy, albeit somewhat frightened, was self-possessed and shrewd enough not to beguile his escort with an account of himself.

"I told you all I'm going to," he added. "I was going through the woods and I saw the deer and killed him. Then, I went through to Barrett's and I was going to come along this road to Chandler. If I have to be taken to a judge, I'll tell him more if he makes me. Please take your hand off my shoulder because I'm not going to try to run away."

"Yer been readin' Diamond Dick?" asked Farmer Sands, squinting at him with a look of diabolical sagacity.

"No, I haven't been reading Diamond Dick," said Westy.

"Wasn't yer stayin' up ter Nelson's place?" the game warden asked.

"Yes, he's my uncle," said Westy.

"He know yer got a gun?"

"Sure, he does."

"Well, you'd better 'phone him when you get to Chandler if you don't want ter spend the night in a cell."

Westy balked at the sound of this talk, but he only tightened his sweaty palm in his pocket and said, "He didn't kill the deer. Why should I 'phone to him?"

Farmer Sands poked his billy-goat visage around in front of Westy's face and stared but said nothing.

In Chandler, the trio aroused some curiosity as they went through the main street and Westy felt conscious and ashamed. He wished that Mr. Terry would conceal his flaunting badge. As they approached the rather pretentious County Court House, he began to feel nervous. The stone building had a kind of dignity about it and seemed to frown on him. Moreover in the brick wing he saw small, heavily barred windows, and these were not a cheerful sight.

What he feared most of all was that once in the jaws of that unknown monster, the law, he would spoil everything by saying more than he meant to say. He was probably saved from this by the dignitary before whom he was taken. The learned justice was so fond of talking himself that Westy had no opportunity of saying anything and was not invited to enlarge upon the simple fact that he had killed a deer. Probably if the local dignitary had known Westy better he would have expressed some surprise at the boy's act but since, to him, Westy was only a boy with a gun (always a dangerous combination) there was nothing so very extraordinary in the fact of his shooting a deer. Fortunately, he did not ask questions for Westy would not have gone to the extreme of actually lying.

He stood before the desk of the justice, one sweaty palm encircled about his precious fortune in his pocket, and felt frightened and ill at ease.

"Well, my young friend," said the justice, "those who disregard the game laws of this state must expect to pay the penalty."

"Y-yes, sir," said Westy nervously.

"It's an expensive pastime," said the justice, not unkindly.

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"I can't understand why you did it, a straightforward, honest-looking boy like you."

Westy said nothing, only set his lips tightly as if to safeguard himself against saying too much or giving way to his feelings.

"A boy that is honest enough to speak up and confess—to do such a thing—I can't understand it," the justice mused aloud, observing Westy keenly.

"It's lettin' 'em hev guns that's to blame," observed the game warden.

"It's dressin' 'em all up like hunters an' callin' 'em scaouts as duz it," said Farmer Sands. "They was wantin' me ter *con*tribute money fer them scaouts, but I sez—I sez *no,* 'tain't no good gon' ter come of it, dressin' youngsters up 'an givin' 'em firearms an' sendin' 'em out ter vialate the laws."

"They seem to know how to tell the truth," said the justice, apparently rather puzzled.

"He was gon' ter hide in Luke Meadows' place when we catched him red-handed an' he wuz sceered outer his seven senses an' that's why he confessed," said Farmer Sands vehemently.

"Nobody can scare me into doing anything," said Westy, defiantly. "I told because I wanted to tell

and the reason you didn't give money to the boy scouts was because you're too stingy."

This was the second time on that fateful day that Westy had shot and hit the mark. It seemed to amuse both the judge and the game warden.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PENALTY

"Has your uncle a telephone?" the justice asked, not unkindly.

"No, sir," said Westy. "Anyway, I wouldn't want to telephone him."

"Could you get your father in Bridgeboro by 'phone?"

"He'd be in New York, and anyway, I don't want to 'phone him."

"Hum," mused the judge. "Well, I'm afraid I haven' much choice then, my boy. The fine for what you did is a hundred dollars. I'll have to turn you over to the sheriff, then perhaps I'll get in communication——"

Westy's sweaty, trembling hand came up out of his pocket bringing his treasure with it. Boyishly, he did not even think to remove the elastic band which was around the roll of bills, but laid the whole thing upon the justice's desk.

"Here—here it is," he said nervously, "—to—to pay for what I did. There's more than what you said—there's three dollars more."

There was a touch of pathos in the innocence which was ready to pay the fine with extra measure—and to throw in an elastic band as well. Farmer Sands looked shrewdly suspicious as the justice removed the elastic band and counted the money; he seemed on the point of hinting that Westy might have stolen it.

"Where did you get this?" the justice asked, visibly touched at the sight of the little roll that Westy had handed over.

"I had about twenty-five dollars when I came," said Westy, "and the rest my uncle paid me for working for him on his farm."

"There seems to be three dollars too much," the justice said, handing that amount back to Westy. The boy took it nervously and said, "Thank you."

The crumpled bills and the elastic band lay in a disorderly little heap on the justice's desk, and the local official, who seemed very human, contemplated them ruefully. Perhaps he felt a little twinge of meanness. Then he rubbed his chin ruminatively and studied Westy.

The culprit moved from one foot to the other and nervously replaced the trifling remainder of his fortune in his trousers pocket. He was afraid that now something was going to happen to spoil his good turn. He hoped that the justice would not ask him any more questions.

"Well, my young friend," said that dignitary finally, "you've had a lesson in what it means to defy the law. I blame it to that rifle you have there more than to you. Does your father know you have that rifle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Approves of it, eh?"

"N-no, sir; I promised him I wouldn't shoot at anything but a target."

"And you broke your promise?"

"Yes, sir."

Still the judge studied him. "Well," said he, after a pause, "I don't think you're a bad sort of a boy. I think you just saw that deer and couldn't refrain from shooting him. I think you felt like Buffalo Bill, now didn't you?"

"I—yes—I—I don't know how Buffalo Bill felt," said Westy.

"And if Mr. Sands hadn't got in touch with Mr.

Terry and found that deer, you would have gone back home thinking you'd done a fine, heroic thing, eh?"

Westy did think he had done a good thing but he didn't say so.

"But you had the honesty to confess when you saw that an innocent man was about to be arrested. And that's what makes me think that you're a not half-bad sort of a youngster."

Westy shifted from one foot to the other but said nothing.

"You just forgot your promise when you saw that deer."

"I didn't forget it, I just broke it," said Westy

"Well, now," said the judge, "you've had your little fling at wild west stuff, you've killed your deer and paid the penalty and you see it isn't so much fun after all. You see where it brings you. Now I want you to go home and tell your father that you shot a deer out of season and that it cost you a cold hundred dollars. See?"

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"You ask him if he thinks that pays. And you tell him I said for him to take that infernal toy away from you before you shoot somebody or other's lit-

tle brother or sister—or your own mother, maybe."

Westy winced.

"If I were your father instead of justice of the peace here, I'd take that gun away from you and give you a good trouncing and set you to reading the right kind of books—that's what I'd do."

"I wouldn' leave no young un of mine carry no hundred dollars in his pockets, nuther," volunteered Farmer Sands.

"Well, it's good he had it," said the justice, "or I'd have had to commit him." Then turning to Westy, he said, "Maybe that hundred dollars is well spent if it taught you a lesson. You go along home now and tell your father what I said. And you tell him I said that a rifle is not only a dangerous thing but a pretty expensive thing to keep."

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"Are you sorry for what you did?"

"As long as I paid the fine do I have to answer more questions?" asked Westy.

"Well, you remember what I've said."

"Yes, sir," said Westy.

"Did you ever hear of Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son?"

"N-no—yes, sir, in school."

"Well, you get that book and read it."

Westy said nothing. To lose his precious hundred dollars seemed bad enough. To be sentenced to read Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son was nothing less than inhuman.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

It was now mid-afternoon. The boy who had gone to work on his uncle's farm so as to earn money to take him to Yellowstone Park, stood on the main street of the little town of Chandler with three dollars and some small change in his pocket. This was the final outcome of all his hoping and working through the long summer. He had just about enough money to get home to Bridgeboro.

And there only disgrace awaited him. For he would not tell the true circumstances of his killing the deer. He had assured Luke Meadows of his freedom; he would not imperil that freedom now by confiding in any one. His father might not see it as he did and might make the facts of the case known to these local authorities. Westy thought of the little, motherless girl clinging to her father, and this picture, which had aroused him to rash generosity, strengthened his resolution now. Westy was no

quitter; he had done this thing, and he would accept the consequences.

What he most feared was that at home they would question him and that he would be confronted with the alternative of telling all or of lying. He thought only of Luke Meadows and of the little girl. And being in it now, for better or worse, he was resolved that he would stand firm upon the one simple, truthful admission that he had killed a deer.

Yet he was so essentially honest that he could not think of returning to Bridgeboro without first going back to the farm to tell them what he had done. He knew that this would mean questioning and might possibly, through some inadvertence of his own, be the cause of the whole story coming to light. But he could not think of going to Bridgeboro, leaving these people who had been so kind to him to hear of his disgrace from others. He would go back himself and tell his aunt; he would be in a great hurry to catch the later train and that would save him from being questioned. Yet it seemed a funny thing to do to go back and hurriedly announce that he had killed a deer and as hurriedly depart. Poor Westy, he was beginning to see the difficulties involved in his spectacular good turn.

He wandered over to the railroad, worried and perplexed. Wherever he might go there would be trouble. He would have to face his aunt and uncle, then his father and mother. And he could not explain. How could he hope to run the gauntlet of all these people with just the one little technical truth that he had killed a deer?

It was just beginning to dawn on him that truth is not a technical thing at all, that to stick to a technical truth may be very dishonest. Yet, he had (so he told himself) killed the deer. And that one technical little truth he had invoked to save Luke Meadows.

He would not, he *could* not turn back now.

CHAPTER XV

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

He could catch a train to Bridgeboro in half an hour and leave the thunderbolt to break at the farm after he was safely away. Or he could return to the farm and still catch a train from Chandler at eight-twenty. He decided to do this.

He lingered weakly in the station for a few minutes, killing time and trying to make up his mind just what he would say when he reached the farm. The station was dim and musty and full of dust and aged posters. One of these latter was a glaring advertisement of an excursion to Yellowstone Park. It included a picture of Old Faithful Geyser, that watery model of constancy which is to be seen on every folder and booklet describing the Yellowstone. Westy looked at it wistfully. "See the glories of your native land," the poster proclaimed. He read it all, then turned away.

The ticket office was closed, and in his troubled

and disconsolate mood it seemed to him as if even the railroad shut him out. Not a living soul was there in the station except a queer-looking woman with spectacles and a sunbonnet and an outlandish bag at her feet. Westy wondered whether she were going to New York.

Then he wondered whether, when he reached Bridgeboro, he might not properly say that he was very sleepy and let his confession go over till morning. Then it occurred to him that he was just dilly-dallying, and he strode out of the station and through the little main street where farming implements were conspicuous among the displays. He paused to glance at these and other things in which he had never before had an interest. Never before had he found so many excuses for pausing along a business thoroughfare.

He intended to return through the woods but a man in a buckboard with a load of clanking milk cans gave him a lift and set him down at the cross-roads near the farm. He cut up through the orchard because he had a queer feeling that he did not want any one to see him coming. It seemed very quiet about the farm; he had an odd feeling that he was seeing it during his own absence. It looked strange

"MERCY ON US, WHAT YOU DOIN' HERE?" GASPED AUNT MIRA.
Westy Martin. *Page* 73

to see his aunt stringing beans on the little porch outside the kitchen and Ira sitting with his legs stretched along the lowest step. His back was against the house and he was smoking his pipe. The homely, familiar scene made Westy homesick for the farm.

"Mercy on us, what you doin' here?" Aunt Mira gasped. "Westy! You near skeered the life out of me!"

Ira removed his atrocious pipe from his mouth long enough to inquire without the least sign of shock. "What's the matter, kid? Get lost in the woods and missed your train?"

"No, I didn't get lost in the woods," said Westy, with a touch of testiness.

"Land's sake, Iry, why can't you never stop plaguin' the boy," said Aunt Mira.

"I came back," said Westy rather clumsily. "I came back to tell you something. I've got something I want to tell you because I—because I want to be the one to tell you——"

"You lost your money," interrupted Aunt Mira. "I told your uncle he should have made you a check."

"Scouts and them kind don't carry no checks," said Ira.

"I came back," said Westy, "because I want to tell you that I shot a deer in the woods and killed him. It's true so you needn't ask me any questions about it because—because I shot him because I had good reasons—anyway, because I wanted to, so there's no good talking about it."

Aunt Mira laid down her work and stared at Westy. Ira removed his pipe and looked at him keenly yet somewhat amusedly. Aunt Mira's look was one of blank incredulity. Ira could not be so easily jarred out of his accustomed calm.

"Where'd yer shoot 'im?" he asked.

"In the woods," said Westy; "in—in—do you mean where—what part of him? In his head."

"Plunked 'im good, huh? Ye'll have Terry after you, then you'll have ter give 'im ten bucks to hush the matter up. Just couldn't resist, huh?"

"Ira, you keep still," commanded Aunt Mira, concentrating her attention on Westy. "What do you mean tellin' such nonsense?" she questioned.

"I mean just that," said Westy; "that I killed a deer and I did it because I wanted to. Then I went through the woods to Barrett's because I decided to go to Chandler that way, and while I was talking to a man there the game warden and another man

came along because they must have been—they must have known about it or something.

"Anyway, I told them I did it—killed the deer. So then I got arrested and they took me to Chandler and the judge or justice of the peace or whatever they call him, he said I had to pay a hundred dollars, so I did. I've got enough left to get home with, all right. But anyway, I didn't want you to hear about it because I wanted to tell you myself. I've got to stand the blame because I killed him and so that's all there is to it."

It was fortunate for Westy that Aunt Mira was too dumfounded for words. As for Ira, his face was a study during the boy's recital. He watched Westy shrewdly, now and then with a little glint of amusement in his eye as the young sportsman stumbled along with his boyish confession. Only once did he speak and that was when the boy had finished.

"Who was the man you was talkin' with in Barrett's, kid?"

"His name is Meadows," Westy answered.

"Hmph," was Ira's only comment.

Indeed he had no opportunity for comment for Aunt Mira was presently upon him and her incisive commentary on Ira's qualities probably saved Westy

the discomfort of further questioning. He was such a thoroughly good boy that now when he confessed to doing wrong, Aunt Mira felt impelled to lay the blame to some one else. And Ira was the victim. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

AUNT MIRA AND IRA

"Now you see, Iry Hasbrook, where your boastin' and braggin' and lyin' yarns has led to," said Aunt Mira, after Westy had gone. It had proved impossible to detain him, and he had marched off after his sensational disclosure with a feeling of infinite relief that no complications had occurred. But he might have seen danger of complications in Ira's shrewd, amused look if he had only taken the trouble to notice it.

"He's a great kid," said Ira.

"A pretty mess you've got him in," said Aunt Mira, "with your *droppin'* this and *droppin'* that. Now he's *dropped* his deer and I hope you're satisfied. 'Twouldn't be no wonder if he ran away to sea and you to blame, Ira Hasbrook. It's because he's so good and trustin' and makes heroes out of every one, even fools like you with your kidnappin' kings and rum smugglin' and what all."

"How 'bout the book in the settin' room?" Ira asked.

Aunt Mira made no answer to this but she at least paid Ira the compliment of rising from her chair with such vigor of determination that the dishpan full of beans which had been reposing in her lap was precipitated upon the floor. She strode into the sitting-room where the "sumptuous, gorgeously illustrated volume" lay upon the innocent worsted tidy which decorously covered the marble of the center table.

Laying hands upon it with such heroic determination as never one of its flaunted hunters showed, she conveyed it to the kitchen and forthwith cremated it in the huge cooking stove. Then she returned to the back porch with an air that suggested that what she had just done to the book was intended as an illustration of what she would like to do to Ira himself. But Ira was not sufficiently sensitive to take note of this ghastly implication.

"Yer recipe for makin' currant wine was in that book," was all he said.

For a moment, Aunt Mira paused aghast. It seemed as if, in spite of her spectacular display, Ira had the better of her. He sat calmly smoking his pipe.

"Why didn't you call to me that it was there?" she demanded sharply.

"You wouldn't of believed me, I'm such a liar," said Ira quietly.

"I don't want to hear no more of your talk, Iry," said the distressed and rather baffled lady. "I don't know as I mind losin' the recipe. What I'm thinkin' about is the hundred dollars that poor boy worked to get—and you went and lost for him."

She had subsided to the weeping stage now and she sat down in the old wooden armchair and lifted her gingham apron to her eyes and all Ira could see was her gray head shaking. Her anger and decisive action had used up all her strength and she was a touching enough spectacle now, as she sat there weeping silently, the string beans and the empty dishpan scattered on the porch floor at her feet.

"He's all right, aunty," was all that Ira said.

"I thank heavens he told the truth 'bout it leastways," Aunt Mira sobbed, pathetically groping for the dishpan. "I thank heavens he come back here like a little man and told the truth. I couldn't of beared it if he'd just sneaked away and lied. He won't lie to Henry—if he wouldn't lie to me he won't lie to Henry. I do hope Henry won't be hard with

him—I know he won't lie to his father, 'tain't him to do that. He was just tempted, he saw the deer and his head was full of all what you told him and that pesky book I hope the Lord will forgive me for ever buyin'. I'm goin' to write to Henry this very night and tell him I burned up the book and prayed for forgiveness for you, Iry Hasbrook—I am."

Ira puffed his horrible pipe in silence for a few moments, and in that restful interval could be heard the sound of the bars being let down so that the cows might return to their pasture. The bell on one wayward cow sounded farther and farther off as Uncle Dick, all innocent of the little tragedy, drove the patient beasts into the upper meadow.

The clanking bell reminded poor Aunt Mira to say, "You told him he couldn't even shoot a cow, you did, Iry."

"He's just about the best kid that ever was," was all that Ira answered.

"I'm goin' to write to Henry to-night and I'm goin' to tell him, Iry, just what you been doin', I am. I'm goin' to tell him that poor boy isn't to blame. I know Henry won't be hard on him. I'm

goin' to tell him about that book and ask him to forgive me my part in it," the poor lady wept.

"Ask him if he's got a good recipe for currant wine," drawled Ira.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOMECOMING

Aunt Mira's tearful prayers were not fully answered, not immediately at all events. Westy's father *was* "hard on him." His well advertised prejudice against rifles as "toys" seemed justified in the light of his son's fall from grace. Westy did not have to incur the perils of a detailed narrative.

Mr. Martin, notwithstanding his faith in his son, had always been rather fanatical about this matter of "murderous weapons" even where Westy was concerned. He was very pig-headed, as Westy's mother often felt constrained to declare, and the mere fact of the killing of the deer was quite enough for a gentleman in his state of mind. Fortunately, he did not prefer a kindly demand for particulars.

"I just did it and I'm not going to make any excuses," said Westy simply. "I told you I did it because I wouldn't do a thing like that and not tell you.

You can't say I didn't come home and tell you the truth."

The memorable scene occurred in the library of the Martin home, Westy standing near the door ready to make his exit obediently each time his father thundered, "That's all I've got to say." First and last Mr. Martin said this as many as twenty times. But there seemed always more to say and poor Westy lingered, fending the storm as best he could.

It was the night of his arrival home, his little trunk had been delivered earlier in the day, and on the library table were several rustic mementos of the country which the boy had thought to purchase for his parents and his sister Doris. A plenitude of rosy apples (never forgotten by the homecoming vacationist) were scattered on the sofa where Doris sat sampling one of them. Mrs. Martin sat at the table, a book inverted in her lap. Mr. Martin strode about the room while he talked.

They had all been away and the furniture was still covered with ghostly sheeting. About the only ornaments at large were the little birch bark gewgaws and the imitation bronze ash receptacle which Westy had brought with him. This latter, which seemed to

mock the poor boy's welcome home had GREETINGS FROM CHANDLER printed on it and was for his father.

"And that's all I've got to say," said Mr. Martin.

"Anyway, I didn't lie," said Westy, his eyes brimming.

"I never accused you of lying and I'm not laying all the blame to you either," thundered his father. "Three and three and three make nine. A boy, a gun, and a wild animal make a killing and that's all there is to it."

"Well, then let's talk of something else," said Mrs. Martin gently. "Don't you think this ash tray is very pretty? Westy brought it to you, dear."

"For goodness' sake, don't use the word *dear* again, mother," said Doris, munching her apple. "I've heard so much about deers——"

"And the boy's lost a hundred dollars!" thundered Mr. Martin, ignoring his daughter. "When I was his age——"

"Well, he's had his lesson," said Doris sweetly. "A hundred dollars isn't so much for a good lesson."

"No?" said her father. "It's enough for you to make a big fuss about when you want it. I said from the beginning that I was opposed to firearms.

I don't want them around the house—look at Doctor Warren's boy."

At this Doris sank into a limp attitude of utter despair, for the accidental killing of the Warren boy had occurred before Westy was born and it had been cited on an average of twice a day ever since Westy's rifle had been brought into the house under the frowning protest of his father.

"Well, now, let's settle this matter once and for all," said Mr. Martin. "And I don't want to be interrupted either," he added. "You've bought a gun against my wishes," he said, turning on Westy. "You had to have a gun—nothing would do but a gun. Your mother saw no harm. Your sister said there was—what did you say?—something heroic, was it, about a gun? All right, you got the gun—repeater or whatever it is. I asked you not to take it away with you but you must take it to shoot at targets. You went up there to earn some money to go out to the Yellowstone. Now here you are back again with hardly a cent in your pockets and you've broken the law and the one thing I'm thankful for is that you haven't shed the blood of some other boy. Now this is the last word I'm going to say about it——"

Doris groaned, Mrs. Martin looked sadly at her son who was listening respectfully, shifting from one foot to the other, his straightforward eyes brimming over.

"This is the last I'm going to say about it," repeated Mr. Martin in a way which did actually at last suggest something in the way of a decisive end of the whole business. "Now, Westy," he continued with a note of feeling in his voice, "you've put an end to all my thoughts about going to the Yellowstone with you." Westy gulped, listening. "You've paid the money you earned and saved to keep yourself out of jail. Three and three and three make nine——"

"Just the same as they did before," said Doris sweetly.

"—a boy, a gun, and a wild animal, those three things spell danger. Now, my boy, I'm not going to go on blaming you and I'm not going to ask you any questions because those three things answer the question good enough for me. Boy—gun—— And you've lost a hundred dollars and had a good scare. I don't blame you that you don't want to talk about it. The gun spoke for itself; am I right?"

"Y-yes, sir," Westy gulped.

"All right then, as they say, return the goods and no questions asked. They say every dog is entitled to one bite and I suppose every boy that has a gun gets one shot. Now you've had yours and paid a good price for it. Now, Westy, you bring me that gun, here and now." He clapped his hands with an air of finality and there followed a tense silence.

"If—if I don't—if I promise not to use—even take it outdoors——"

"No, sir, you bring me that gun here and now."

Mr. Martin was grimly mandatory and neither his wife nor daughter ventured a word, though Mrs. Martin looked the picture of misery. Westy brought his precious rifle from his room and handed it to his father. Mr. Martin held it as if it were a poisonous snake. The mirthful Doris placed the apple she was eating upon her head as if to invite the modern William Tell to shoot it off. But Mr. Martin was not tuned to this sort of banter.

Unlocking the closet beside the fireplace he gingerly lay the rifle inside it and locked the closet again, joggling the door to give himself double assurance that it was securely locked. In his over-sensitive

state, Westy construed this last act as an implication by his father that his son might later try to get the door open.

"You don't have to lock it," said Westy proudly.

"It isn't you he's thinking about, dearie," said Mrs. Martin. "He's afraid about the gun."

Very likely that was true. Mr. Martin had indeed lost some faith in Westy's ability to keep his promise where a gun was concerned, but his confidence in his son had not diminished to a point where he believed Westy would invade that forbidden closet. Probably Doris expressed her father's mental state accurately enough when she said later to her mother,

"He isn't afraid that Westy will break in, he's afraid that the gun will break out. The rifle has got father's goat as well as somebody or other's deer."

"You shouldn't use such slang, dear," said Mrs. Martin gently.

The dungeon to which the rifle had been consigned was one of those holy of holies to be found in every household. Mr. Martin had always been the exclusive warden of this mysterious retreat.

As a little boy, Westy had supposed it contained a skeleton (he never knew why he thought so) and that all his father's worldly wealth was there secreted

in an iron chest of the kind which has always been in vogue with pirates. Later, when he had learned of the existence of banks he had abandoned this belief and had come to know (he knew not how) that the closet contained books which had undergone parental censorship and been banned from the library shelves. Doris had never regarded this closet with the same reverential awe that Westy had shown for it; she said it was full of moths and that its forbidden literature was easily procurable through other sources.

But ever since Westy and Roy Blakeley had tried to peek in through the keyhole of this closet to discover the skeleton there, the son of the house had looked upon it as a place of mystery. And though it had lost some of the glamor of romance as he had grown older, he knew that whatever was in it never came out. It was a tomb.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RAY OF SUNSHINE

Mrs. Martin gave Westy about ten minutes to regain his poise and then followed him to his room where his open trunk stood in the middle of the floor. Westy was sitting on the bed and the oil-cloth cover of his departed rifle lay like a snake upon the pretty bedspread. It was evident that when he had gone to his room to get the gun in obedience to his father's demand, he had removed the cover to gaze at his treasure before handing it over. Mrs. Martin lifted the limp thing and hung it over the foot-board.

"I'm going to ask him to put the gun in it," Westy said wistfully.

"I don't think I would, dearie," said his mother, sitting down on the bed beside him. "I think I just wouldn't say any more about it; let the matter drop. If you speak to him again he will only flare up.

Doris says she thinks some ancestor of his may have been killed by a rifle back in the dark ages; some cave man, that's what she says. And she thinks the fear of guns is in your father's blood. He's very nervous about such things, dearie."

"They didn't have rifles in the dark ages," said Westy.

"I know, but it's just the way Doris talks; she's very modern and independent. She shouldn't say that a hundred dollars isn't a great deal of money, for it is. Maybe it isn't a great deal for Charlie Westcott and those friends of hers, but it's a good deal for you, dear."

Westy sat on the edge of the bed half listening, his eyes brimming. And it is odd, when you come to think of it, that no one save a rough farm-hand with an exceedingly varied and checkered career, had ever taken particular notice of a certain quality in those gray eyes.

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Martin with deep sympathy and affection, "I'm so sorry, so sorry for the whole thing. Your father should never have suggested your going to work on the farm. Now he says he never wants to hear the Yellowstone mentioned. Doris says she thinks we may have to take

the yellow vase from the parlor because it will remind him of the Yellowstone——"

"I don't mind," said Westy, getting command enough of himself to speak. "I had fun working and I don't mind about the hundred dollars."

"And it was so noble and straightforward of you to tell your father what you had done. I told him if he had only given you a chance you might have explained. I told him that perhaps the deer was chasing you and intended to kill you."

Westy smiled ruefully.

"Was it?" his mother ventured to ask.

"No, deers don't run after people," Westy said.

"Well, I don't know anything about them," said his mother resignedly.

"It's all right, mom," said Westy.

"I'm only sorry you ever went up there," mused Mrs. Martin. "But I want you to promise me, dearie, that you won't say another word about it to your father; don't speak about Yellowstone Park either, because he feels very strongly about the whole thing."

"I won't," said Westy.

"You know, dear," Mrs. Martin observed with

undeniable truth, "I've known your father longer than you have. We must just say nothing and let the whole matter blow over. Very soon he'll be angry about his income tax and then he'll forget about this summer. He thinks that your Uncle Dick shouldn't have such men about his place as that horrible Ira, as you call him. He blames that man more than you. He says that farms are hiding places for good-for-nothing scoundrels who can't get employment elsewhere."

"Ira isn't a scoundrel," said Westy.

"Well, he stole a king, and I'm sure a man that steals a king isn't a gentleman."

There seemed no answer to this. But Westy moved closer to his mother and let her put her arm about him.

"Now, dearie, it's all over," she said, "and it was a horrible nightmare and I'm proud of my boy because he was straightforward and honest—and I'm sure your father is too. But he's very queer and we mustn't cross him. So now we'll forget all about it and I've something to tell you. Pee-wee Harris——"

At the very mention of this name Westy laughed.

For Pee-wee Harris, present or absent, spread sunshine in the darkest places. But never in a darker place than in Westy's room that night of his return from his summer's vacation.

"They're back from camp, then?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIX

PEE-WEE ON THE JOB

"YES, they're back," said Mrs. Martin, "and Pee-wee was here last evening and talked steadily for two hours. He told me to tell you to come to scout meeting to-morrow and vote——"

"Vote? What for?"

"I don't know, it's something about an award," said Westy's mother. "The Rotary Club has offered some kind of an award for scouts, that's all I know. He told me to tell you to be sure to come and vote. He said it's a special meeting at Roy's house and they're going to have refreshments."

"They won't have any when he gets through," said Westy wistfully.

"I'm so glad," said his mother, rising, "that you can plunge right into your scout work and forget all about this dreadful summer. At the seashore we were very much disappointed, the gnats were terrible. I'm glad we're all home and that it's over. Doris did

nothing but dance and she's lost eight pounds instead of gaining."

"All right, mom," said Westy, letting his mother kiss him good night. "I'm glad I'm home too; I'll be glad to see the troop. It makes me feel good just to hear you mention Pee-wee."

"I'm sure he'll cheer you up," said Mrs. Martin. "I don't know what to think about what he says—I'm sure he always tells the truth."

"Oh, yes, but sometimes he stands on his head and tells it so it's upside down," laughed Westy; "that's what Roy says."

"He says that Warde Hollister found some sort of a job for a woman up near camp so that the woman won't have to send her little child to the orphan asylum. He ran five miles through a swamp, Walter says. I hope to goodness he had his rubbers on."

"Was it a boy or a girl—the child, I mean?" Westy asked.

"I'm sure I don't know, but I think the father is in jail. Anyway, the boys want you to vote for Warde. Now will you promise me you'll go to sleep?"

Westy promised, and kept his promise that time at

NOW THAT HE WAS BACK AMONG THEM, THE SUMMER SEEMED LIKE A NIGHTMARE.

Westy Martin.

all events. If he had known all there was to know about these matters perhaps he would not have fallen asleep so easily.

He did not have to wait until the following evening, for the next morning Pee-wee Harris (Raven and mascot) arrived like a thunder-storm and opened fire at once upon Westy.

"Now you see what you get for going somewhere else and I'm glad I'm not sorry for you, but anyway I'm sorry you weren't there because we had more fun at Temple Camp this summer than ever before and we're going to have the biggest hero scout in our troop and his picture is going to be in *Boys' Life* and his name is going to be in the newspapers and I bet you don't know who it is, I bet you don't!"

"Is it you?"

"Why?"

"Because you said the *biggest.*"

"Listen, you have to be sure to come to scout meeting to-night—they're going to have refreshments, but that isn't the reason, but anyway you have to be sure to come and I'll tell you why—listen. You know good turns? Listen! The Rotary Club—my father's a member of it—listen!—they offered a prize to the scout that did the biggest good turn in-

volving resources and powers—I mean prowess, that's what it said, during this summer. Only the scout has to be in a troop in this county, that's the only rule.

"Every troop in the county has a right to vote who did the biggest good turn in the troop and then they send the name of that scout to the Rotary Club and those men have a committee to read the reports sent from all the different troops and then they decide which scout out of all those scouts did the biggest good turn. All the good turns are big ones because if they're not they don't get to the league and they decide which is the biggest of all the big ones and then—listen! *Listen! The scout that gets elected by those men gets a free trip to Yellowstone Park next summer and all his expenses are paid, candy and sodas and everything.* And after they elect him they're going to have a banquet. And do you know who's going to the Yellowstone? Warde Hollister."

"You mean they've voted already?" Westy asked.

"No, not till next Saturday night, but anyway we're going to elect him and send his name in and when you hear what he did you'll vote for him all right and I bet you'll be proud he's in your patrol.

You needn't ask me what he did because you have to come and find out and there's going to be ice cream, too. So will you be there?"

"You bet," said Westy, smiling, "but how about other troops all over the county? They haven't been asleep all summer."

"Gee whiz, what do we care?" said Pee-wee.

"You'd better not be too sure," Westy laughed.

"I bet you—I bet you a soda Warde's the one to go," vociferated Pee-wee.

"All right," said Westy.

"Do you bet he won't?" Pee-wee demanded incredulously. *"A feller in your own patrol?"*

"They've got some pretty good scouts over in Little Valley," said Westy.

"What do we care? You just wait. Will you surely be there—up at Roy's?"

"You bet," said Westy.

CHAPTER XX

SOME NOISE

It was good to see the familiar faces once again, to hear Roy's banter and Pee-wee's vociferous talk. And now that he was back among them, the summer did indeed seem like a nightmare, a thing to be forgotten. It was not hard for Westy to forget his disgrace (or at least to put it out of his thoughts) in the merry, bustling troop atmosphere.

They met in the barn at Roy's house up on Blakeley's Hill, where a fine troop meeting room had been fixed up, with electric lights and a radio that never worked.

"Allow me to introduce the honorable Westy Martin," shouted Roy, standing on the old kitchen table which his mother had donated to the cause of scouting; "Silver Fox in good standing except when he's sitting down. Hey, Westy, we're going to have refreshments on account of all being so fresh, that's what my father says—I should worry. Hey, Westy,

Pee-wee says next summer you're going to take your rifle to Coney Island and shoot the chutes—he's so dumb he thinks chutes are wild animals."

"Next summer I'm going away with the troop," said Westy.

"The pleasure is ours," Roy shouted. "We can stand it if you can. Temple Camp wasn't like the same place without you—it was better. Did you hear about Warde, how he's going to get his head in the fly-paper, I mean his face in the newspaper? He's already rejected by an overwhelming majority."

"I don't know anything but what Pee-wee told me," said Westy, speaking as much to Warde as to Roy, "but I'm for you all right."

"And you ought to be proud of your patrol," said the genial, familiar voice of Mr. Ellsworth, their scoutmaster, trying to reach Westy with his hand.

"Hurrah for the Silver-plated Foxes," shouted Roy.

"If the leader of the Silver-plated Foxes will give me the floor for a few minutes," laughed Mr. Ellsworth, "we can get down to business and then——"

"Have the refreshments," shouted Pee-wee. "Everybody sit down."

"Also shut up," shouted Roy.

"Also listen," said Mr. Ellsworth.

"Absolutely, positively," said Roy. "First let's give three cheers on account of Westy being back, I mean three groans."

"Then," said Mr. Ellsworth, "as our sprightly leader of the Silver Foxes would say, let's have a large chunk of silence——"

"And very little of that," shouted Roy.

"You're crazy," shouted Pee-wee.

"We're proud of it," shouted Roy.

"Shut up, everybody," shouted Doc Carson.

"How can I shut up when I wasn't saying anything?" thundered Pee-wee.

"Shut up, anyway," shouted Roy. "Three cheers for Westy Martin down off the farm. How are the pigs, Westy?"

"Pretty well, how are all *your* folks?" Westy was inspired to answer.

"No sooner said than stung," said Roy. "If I said anything I'm sorry for I'm glad of it."

"Suppose you say nothing at all," laughed Mr. Ellsworth.

"The pleasure is mine," said Roy, subsiding.

"Scouts," said Mr. Ellsworth, having gained the floor at last. "This is a special meeting for a pur-

pose which you all know about except Westy——"

"I told him!" shouted Pee-wee.

"And he will become familiar with the matter as we proceed," Mr. Ellsworth continued. "As all of us know, the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro has done a very splendid and public-spirited thing. This organization has offered a reward to the scout of Rockvale County who shall be selected as the one who has done the most conspicuous good turn during the summer. This award, as we know, is a free trip to the Yellowstone National Park, where a national jamboree for Boy Scouts is to be held.

"Special stress was laid upon one or two requirements which would lift the good turn out of the class of simple every-day kindness and helpfulness to others. That is, as I understand it, the winning good turn must have something in the way of heroism in it. I don't mean simply physical heroism, of course, but heroism of soul, if I might put it so. Sacrifice, courage—I think we all know what is meant.

"According to the printed letter received by our troop (and by every troop in the county, I suppose) it is our privilege to select by vote the scout among us who has done the most conspicuous good turn.

On last Monday, Labor Day, the period for performance of such good turn closed. In accordance with the printed letter received we had an informal vote and decided that Warde Hollister of the Silver Fox Patrol is entitled to the award, so far as our troop is concerned. There was only one absent member and that was Westy Martin. This, of course, we all know and I'm just running over the matter so that our action may be thoroughly understood and deliberate.

"In accordance with requirements I, as scoutmaster of a contesting troop, have written a report embodying the deed or exploit which Warde did and which we purpose to present to these gentlemen for their consideration. I am now going to read this for the approval of all of you and when I have finished I shall ask all of you to sign it. Your signatures will be your votes, and in this sense they will be perfunctory, as we have already had an unanimous vote. If any of you scouts want to criticize or add anything to my description of the exploit, sing out and don't hesitate."

"I will," shouted Pee-wee at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE GOOD TURN

Mr. Ellsworth unfolded a typewritten paper and read. Westy listened with the greatest attention, for he was the only one who did not already know of his scout brother's exploit.

"The First Bridgeboro New Jersey Troop, B. S. A. respectfully submits to the Rotary Club of this town, the following report of an exploit performed by one of its scouts, Warde Hollister, while at Temple Camp, New York, on the ninth of August this year. This report is made under supervision and guidance of William C. Ellsworth of Bridgeboro, who is officially registered at National Headquarters as scoutmaster of said troop. Conclusive corroborative evidence is readily available to substantiate truthfulness of this report and will be procured and transmitted if desired.

"Whatever may be the issue in this contest, this troop wishes to express its appreciation of the inter-

est and kindness which the Rotary Club has shown to the whole scout membership of this county, and indirectly to the whole great brotherhood of which this troop is a part."

"Gee, but that's dandy language," shouted Pee-wee.

"Unfortunately the award is not for fine language," said Mr. Ellsworth.

Mr. Ellsworth continued reading, "On the date mentioned, Warde Hollister, a scout of the first class, was hiking in the neighborhood of Temple Camp and stopped in a small and humble shack to ask directions——"

"Tell how they gave him a drink of milk," shouted Pee-wee.

"The people were very poor," Mr. Ellsworth read on, "and the mother, a widow, was on the point of sending her little child, a boy of six, to an orphanage, prior to seeking work for herself in the countryside. She seemed broken-hearted at this prospect and was much overcome as she talked with Scout Hollister. The woman's name is Martha Corbett and her home is, or was, on the road running past Temple Camp into Briarvale."

"There's an apple orchard near it," shouted Peewee.

Mr. Ellsworth read on, "That night at Temple Camp, Scout Hollister heard that a wealthy lady living at King's Cove, about seven miles from Temple Camp in a direct line, was leaving for New York by auto that night. This information was imparted to him by the lady's son who was a guest at Temple Camp. The lady, Mrs. Horace E. Hartwell, whose husband is well known in financial circles, intended, among other errands in the city, to secure a female servant for her country home at King's Cove.

"It was known that she would motor to New York late that evening and Scout Hollister, hoping to secure employment for the Corbett woman, tried to get her on the telephone. He had reason to believe from conversation with her son that the Corbett woman might prove available for service if communication could be had with Mrs. Hartwell before her departure for New York.

"Unable to get the Hartwell place by telephone, Hollister decided to go personally to King's Cove by a short cut through the woods. To do this it

was necessary for him to cross a swamp causing much difficulty to the traveler. Hollister covered the entire distance of six miles (including this swamp) in less than two hours, a very remarkable exploit in the way of speed and endurance, and did, in fact, reach King's Cove in time to intercept the Hartwell auto which had already started for New York. It was only by taking the difficult short cut and traversing the dangerous swamp that Hollister was able to do this.

"Hollister made himself known to Mrs. Hartwell as one of the scouts at Temple Camp and was the means of suspending her efforts to obtain a servant in New York until he should have an opportunity to bring Mrs. Corbett to see her.

"The sequel of this exploit was that Mrs. Corbett and her young child were taken into the Hartwell home which seems likely to be a permanent refuge for both.

"It is respectfully submitted to the Rotary Club that this good turn contains both of the elements required for the winning of the Yellowstone award, viz., generosity of purpose and prowess in the consequent exploit."

"How about that, scouts, all right?" Mr. Ells-

worth concluded. "Anybody want to add anything?"

"Three cheers for Warde Hollister!" two or three scouts shouted instinctively.

"Oh, boy, we're going to have a trip to Yellowstone Park in our troop!" vociferated Pee-wee. "Will you send me some post cards from there?"

"Three cheers for the Silver Foxes," shouted Roy; "we thank you."

"You make me tired, *you* didn't do it!" shouted Pee-wee. "Any one would think you were the one that did it, to hear you shout."

"I'm the one that had the responsibility," Roy shot back; "he's in my patrol."

"How about *you,* Warde?" Mr. Ellsworth laughed. "All O. K.?"

"Sure it's O. K.," shouted Pee-wee; "it's dandy language."

"It sounds kind of too——" Warde began.

"No, it doesn't," Pee-wee shouted.

"Well, anyway," Warde laughed, "I'd like to say this if I can have a word——"

"Help yourself," said Roy, "Pee-wee has plenty of them."

"I don't care anything about seeing my name in

the papers," said Warde. "I never thought much about Yellowstone Park but I guess I'd like to go there all right. I don't think so much of that stunt now that it's written down. But if it wins out I'll be glad; I'll be glad mostly on account of the troop——"

"Won't you be glad on account of the grizzly bears?" thundered Pee-wee.

"Sure," Warde laughed, "but I'll be glad mostly because we have—you know—an honor in our troop. I like this troop better than Yellowstone Park. Anyhow this is all I want to say; I hope you fellows won't be disappointed if I—if we don't get it."

"What do you mean *don't get it?*" Pee-wee roared.

"I mean just that," Warde laughed, as he tousled Pee-wee's curly hair. "I hope we get it, but I'm not going to worry about it. And if we do get it I'll be glad on account of the troop. I always stuck to the troop; I could have gone to Europe last summer but I wanted to go away with the troop. And if I do—if I *should*—go out to the Yellowstone this is the way it will be with me; I'll feel as if I'm going for the troop."

"That's the way to talk," said Mr. Ellsworth briskly.

"I was just going to talk that way," thundered Pee-wee.

"Mr. Ellsworth saved us just in time," said Roy. "Young Faithful was going to spurt again. He's got Old Faithful Geyser tearing its hair with jealousy. Old Faithful spurts every hour, he spurts twice a minute."

"Well," laughed Mr. Ellsworth, "if this report strikes you all right, suppose you all put your names to it."

"I'll put mine first," shouted Pee-wee.

It was not until after Westy Martin had signed his name that he had an opportunity of seeking out Warde and talking with him alone. How the hero escaped Pee-wee would be difficult to explain; probably that hero-maker was detained by a prolonged encounter with the refreshments. Warde, always modest, was glad enough to get away from the clamorous throng and walk part way home with Westy, whom he had not seen all summer.

CHAPTER XXII

WARDE AND WESTY

"I SAID it was the troop I was thinking about," Warde observed, "but I guess it's really that kid I'm thinking about as much as anything."

"You mean Mrs. Corbett's kid?" Westy asked.

"No, Pee-wee, Young Faithful. Huh, that's a pretty good name for him, hey?"

"He's all there," Westy said.

"*He's* not going to Yellowstone," said Warde. "Not even a member of his patrol is. Yet, by golly, here he is standing on his head on account of me."

"Yop, that's him all right," said Westy.

"How'd you make out this summer?" Warde asked. "We got a couple of cards from you up at camp. Who's that fellow in the snap-shot you sent me?"

"Oh, he's a farm hand at my uncle's; he's been all over, on whaling cruises and everything. My father calls him a contemptible scoundrel because

he's—I don't know just why—because he's been a sort of tramp—I guess. He helped start a war in a South Sea island and they kidnapped the king."

"That sounds pretty good," said Warde.

"Now that we're all alone," said Westy, purposely avoiding the subject of his own summer, "I want to tell you that was some stunt you did. I signed my name and I signed it good and black; I think I broke my fountain pen."

"I'll bring you one from the Yellowstone," Warde laughed; "if I go," he added.

"I think you'll go all right," said Westy. "You know how it is, Hollie, when a fellow gets home after being away; everybody seems kind of strange. That's the way it seemed with me to-night; that's why I didn't say much, I guess. But now that I'm seeing you all alone I'll tell you that that was one peach of a thing you did. I'm expecting to get post cards from you next summer showing the petrified forests and Inspiration Point and the Old Faithful Inn and all those places—you see."

"You seem to know all about them," said Warde.

"Sure," said Westy, with a note of wistfulness in his voice. "I've read a lot about it; I was—eh—There's another thing I want to say to you while

we're alone. You said you didn't go to Europe last summer so you could be with the troop. You said the troop always comes first with you. I guess you didn't mean that as a shot at me, did you? Because I went away somewhere else this summer?"

"What are you talking about?" Warde laughed, as he rapped Westy on the shoulder and then gave him a shove almost off the sidewalk. "That's you all over, everybody says so; you're so gol blamed sensitive. I wouldn't answer such a crazy question."

"Because I've got the same idea that you have," said Westy. "I'm always wishing I could do something for the troop; the troop comes first with me, you can bet. But, gee, I never seem to be able to do anything. Look at Roy, his father gave the barn——"

"Come out of that," laughed Warde. "Tell me what you were doing all summer. We had *some* summer at Temple Camp."

"Oh, I don't know," said Westy, "nothing in particular. I went for a special reason and I guess it didn't pan out very well. I should worry about it, because anyway it's all over. I don't want to talk about it."

Warde glanced curiously at him but said nothing.

"You can bet I'm going to camp with you fellows next summer," Westy said. "Only probably *you* won't be there."

"Oh, don't be too sure of that," Warde laughed. "There are a few other troops to be heard from, Westy, old boy."

"Well, I'd like to see that award given to our troop," Westy mused. "I don't suppose it makes much difference who goes. If I had to choose a fellow to go it would be you, and I did vote for you, you can bet. But as long as our troop gets the honor it doesn't make much difference who goes. I'm glad I got back in time to vote. Gee williger, I'm proud to vote for a stunt like that—and I'm glad you're in my patrol. That's about all I'm good for, I guess—to vote."

"Who taught me to hit a bull's eye?" Warde asked. "What are you doing to-morrow?" he broke off suddenly. "Come ahead over to my house and we'll try a few cracks at the target; what do you say?"

"Huh," Westy mused wistfully. "I guess I'll have to be getting ready for school to-morrow. I've got to unpack my trunk, too."

"We'll see you Saturday night then? At the Rotary Club?"

"Will they let people go?" Westy asked.

"Sure, the more the merrier," said Warde; "it's a public meeting."

"I'll come and shout for you when they announce the decision," Westy said.

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," laughed Warde.

CHAPTER XXIII

IRA GOES A-HUNTING

When Westy strode away after making his sensational announcement at the farm, Ira Hasbrook watched the departing figure through a dense cloud of tobacco smoke. He was puzzled. For a while he smoked leisurely, submitting with languid amiability to the tirade of Aunt Mira. And when she finally withdrew to the sitting room to write to Bridgeboro he continued smoking and thinking for fully half an hour. Only once in all that time did he make any audible comment.

"Some kid," he mused aloud.

It would be hard to say whether this comment was in approval of Westy's sudden inspiration to kill a deer or in perplexity as to what he actually had done. Certainly Ira would not have held it to the boy's discredit if he had killed a deer. He rather liked Westy's unexplained decision to reform and kill a deer. With such a fine beginning

he might some day even go after an Indian or run away to sea. Ira was greatly amused at the naïve way in which Westy had suddenly come out into the open as a lawless adventurer. . . .

But he was puzzled. For one thing it seemed odd to him that Westy, directly after his bizarre exploit, should have chanced upon Luke Meadows, the leading poacher of the neighborhood and the bane of farmers and game wardens for miles around.

Ira's attitude with respect to Westy's sensational confession was not the moral attitude.

"I'll be gol darned, I don't believe he did it," he mused. His thought seemed to be that it was too good to be true.

He slowly drew himself to his feet, pulled his outlandish felt hat from its peg, refilled his pipe, and sauntered over into the woods where he soon hit the trail which formed the short cut to Chandler. He had not walked fifteen minutes when he heard voices and presently came upon a little group of people gazing at the carcass of the deer. Terry, the game warden, and Farmer Sands were very much in evidence.

"What cher goin' to do with him; drag him out?"

Ira inquired without wasting any words in greeting.

"H'lo, Iry," said the game warden. "Work of the boy scouts; pretty good job, huh?"

"Yere, so he was tellin' me," drawled Ira. "Plunked him right in the bean, huh?"

"Who was tellin' yer?" inquired Farmer Sands with aggressive shrewdness.

"The kid," drawled Ira.

"Yer don't mean he come back and told yer?" Farmer Sands inquired incredulously.

"Uh huh, work of the boy scouts," said Ira. "I was thinkin' he might 'a been lyin' only I don't believe he knows how ter lie any more'n he knows how to shoot. Got a match, Terry?"

Ira leisurely lighted his unwilling pipe and proceeded in his lazy way to examine the carcass.

"Plunked him twice, huh—one under the belly there."

Ira wandered about, kicking the bushes while the men fixed a rope about the head of the carcass.

"I s'pose you know all 'bout what happened then, if the boy went back to the farm?" Terry called to him.

"Me?" Ira answered. "Naah, I don't know

nuthin 'bout what happened. I know the kid lost a hundred dollars he was savin' up. This here tobaccy package b'long to you, Terry?"

"Where'd you find that?" Terry called.

"Over here in the bushes. Me and you never smoked such mild tobaccy as Mechanical Delights or whatever it is. Howling Bulldog Plug Cut for us, hey? Do you need any help, you men? Prob'ly the kid was smokin' Mechanical Delights and didn't know what he was doin', that's my theory. He couldn't see through the smoke."

He stuffed the empty tinfoil package into his pocket and started ambling through the woods toward Barrett's.

"Thar's the man 'at's to blame fer this here vilashun of the law," said Farmer Sands shrewdly. "Him's the man 'at turned that thar youngster's head—I tell yer that, Terry."

"Like enough," said Terry. "Him and that scoutin' craze."

"Maybe it was the scouting craze that made him tell the truth," said a bystander, evidently a city boarder in the neighborhood. "It seems a queer thing that a young boy should break the law and shoot big game and then go and give himself up."

"No, 'tain't nuther," said Farmer Sands. "He got sceered, that's why he *con*fessed. He was sceered outer his skin soon as he clapped eyes on me an' Terry. You can't fool me, by gum! I see jes haow it was the minute I set eyes on the little varmint!"

But he hadn't seen how it was at all. Nor had Terry seen how it was. For the explanation of this whole business was locked up in that dungeon of mysteries in Mr. Martin's library. It had been under their very noses and they had not so much as examined it. And now it was in that closet of dark traditions away off in Bridgeboro, under the grim and autocratic guard of Westy's father. And there it remained until a stronger man than Mr. Martin ordered him to bring it out.

CHAPTER XXIV

CLEWS

Ira ambled along through the woods, emerging at Barrett's where the dubious rumors of his past career always assured him a ready welcome. He had never been of the Barrett's set, preferring the quiet of the farm, and the adventurous game of quietly plaguing Aunt Mira. But they knew him for a former sailor and soldier of fortune (or ill-fortune) and they respected him for the dark traditions which were associated with his name.

He sauntered along the shabby little street till he came to the house of Luke Meadows. He had no better plan than just a quiet tour of observation and inquiry. He intended to chat with Luke. But his curiosity had been greatly enlivened since he had seen the deer.

But at Luke's house he was doomed to surprise and disappointment. The alien had gone away with his little girl. There had been no furniture worth

moving and the westerner's few portable belongings (so the loiterers said) had been taken in a shabby bag.

Luke had not vouchsafed his neighbors any information touching the cause of his departure or his destination. There was a picture, unconsciously and crudely drawn by "Missie Ellis," the neighbor to whose care Meadows had consigned his little daughter just before the scout had saved him from arrest and jail. She seemed a motherly person, well chosen by the man who, in his extremity, had thought only of his little daughter.

"I see them go," said Mrs. Ellis, "and he was carryin' her in one arm and the bag in the other. They went up the road toward Dawson's and I says to my man, I says, sumpin is wrong and they've gone to git the train. The county men was allus after him, houndin' him and houndin' him; Lord knows, I never knew him to do no harm but shoot game. And the little kiddie, she was the livin' image of her mother. I nursed the poor woman when she died of the flu and Luke he jes stood there by the bed and lookin' at her and sayin' not a word. Even after she went not a word did he say.

"She was out of her head, she was, and she was

sayin' how they were back in Cody where they came from and he says, 'Yes, mommy, we'll go back; soon as you can travel we'll go back.' They was strangers here; I guess they was allus thinkin' and frettin' about their big wild west. He says once how he could see miles of prairies, poor man. Sech eyes as he had! Seemed as if he could see across miles of prairies.

"To-day he had some trouble with Terry again. I don't know what it was all about, but there was a youngster over here, a fine likely lookin' young lad and they took him away to Chandler. I says to my man, they've gone to make the poor, frightened boy tell something and then come back an' arrest Luke. So I guess he goes away while it was yet time—Lord knows what it was all about."

Ira walked through the poor, little, deserted house and even he was touched by its bareness. Curious, gossipy neighbors accompanied him, commenting upon the brown, taciturn man who had gone and taken away with him the one thing of value that he possessed, his little girl. If he had gone for fear Westy might weaken, under some rustic third degree, and incriminate him, he might have saved himself the slight inconvenience of a hasty depar-

ture. The scout who had seen to it that the little motherless girl and her father were not parted, was not likely to say one word more than he intended to say to the authorities or to any one else.

One thing Ira did find in the little house which interested him. This was a collection of as many as a dozen empty tinfoil packages on the wooden shelf above the cooking stove. According to the labels they had contained Mechanic's Delight Plug Cut tobacco.

CHAPTER XXV

A BARGAIN

Ira did not see anything remarkable in Westy's having shot the deer twice. He was surprised and amused at the boy, having shot it once; it had caused him to regard Westy as a youthful hero of the true dime novel brand. But he had not much respect for Westy's skill as a marksman. And he was quite ready to believe that two shots had been required to "drop" the deer. Six or eight shots would not greatly have surprised him.

What puzzled him was the undoubted fact (established by the telltale tobacco package) that Luke Meadows had very lately been in the neighborhood of the killing. He had not attached any particular significance to this package until he had seen similar packages in Luke's deserted home. Now he found himself wondering how Westy had happened to be at Luke's house, and why Luke had so suddenly gone away.

The true explanation of the whole business never occurred to Ira. That anybody could voluntarily make the sacrifice that Westy had made was not within the range of his conception. Probably he had never done a mean thing in all his checkered career. But, on the other hand, he had probably never done anything very self-sacrificing. To kidnap a barbarous king was certainly not the act of a gentleman (as Westy's mother had observed) but it was not *mean*. . . .

The nearest that Ira's cogitations brought him to the truth was his suspicion that somehow or other Westy and Luke Meadows had both been involved in the lawless act of killing and that Westy (being the financier of the pair) had been frightened into taking the blame. In this case it seemed likely enough that Luke (aware of his dubious reputation) would depart before Westy should have time to weaken and incriminate him. This was about the best that he could do with the rather puzzling circumstances, and several pipefuls of Howling Bulldog Plug Cut were required to establish this theory.

He had no intention of reopening the unhappy subject with Aunt Mira. It pleased him to have her

believe that Westy was a daring and law-defying huntsman. And the whole matter would probably have died out of his own mind in the preoccupation of his farm duties, save for two incidents which restored his curiosity and revived his interest. Both of these happened the next day, Saturday.

On that afternoon, Ira took the milk cans to the little station at Dawson's and stopped in the post office on the way back. The postmaster, Jeb Speyer, handed him a letter or two and a rolled up newspaper addressed to Aunt Mira. On the wrapper of this newspaper were written the words *marked copy* and Ira contemplated the address and the postmark with that ludicrous air of one who seldom reads.

"Guess it's from that youngster yer had daown t'h' farm," commented Mr. Speyer; "Bridgeberry, hain't it? That youngster oughter be walloped, and by gol, I'd be th' one ter do it, I tell yer; shootin' up th' woods outer season."

"Well, I d'no," drawled Ira, ruefully. "I'd kinder think twice 'fore I'd wallop that kid. He jes soon shoot yer down as look at yer; shot a school teacher fer givin' him a bad mark last winter, I heerd."

"I want ter know!" ejaculated Mr. Speyer.

"Yer got ter handle that kid with gloves," said Ira. "He expects to be a train robber when he grows up. Let's have a paper of tobaccy, Jeb."

"What yer reckon's become of Luke Meadows, Iry?" Jeb asked.

"Him? Oh, I s'pect the kid killed him and hid him away somewheres. The whole truth o' that business ain't out yet, Jeb."

"Think so, huh?" said Jeb shrewdly.

"There's queer things 'bout it," said Ira darkly.

On the way home he paused at the house of Terry, the game warden. He had no object in doing this but Terry's little house was on the way and the game warden was nailing the deerskin to the barn door, so Ira stopped to chat. Terry was the terror of game law violators the county over, but he was a thrifty soul, and benefited so much by illegal killings as to sell deer and fox skins to the market. Thus poor Luke Meadows put money in the pocket of Terry, the game warden. Ira's broad code of morals was not opposed to this sort of thing and he stood by, chatting idly with Terry about the value of the skin.

"I got the bullets, I got the bullets," said Terry's scrawny little daughter, exhibiting them proudly in

the palm of her outstretched hand. "See? I got the bullets."

Half-interested, and more to please the child than for any other reason, Ira glanced at the bullets. Then, suddenly, he took them in his own hand and examined them closely.

What interested him about them was that they were not alike.

"These outer the deer, Terry?" he asked.

"Yop, 'n' don't you put 'em in yer mouth nuther," said Terry, addressing the child instead of Ira. "Them's poison, them is."

"I tell yer what I'll do," said Ira, fumbling in his pockets. "You give me them bullets and I'll give you ten cents an' yer can buy ice cream and lolly-pops and them ain't poison, are they, Terry?"

Terry was too engrossed to review this proposition, but the child complied with alacrity.

"Now me an' you is made a bargain," said Ira. "An' if I get hungry I can chew up the bullets 'cause poison don't hurt me. Once down in South Americy when I deserted from a ship I et poison toads when I was hidin' from cannibals; you ask Auntie Miry if that ain't so. Ain't that so, Terry?"

"Reckon it must be," said Terry, preoccupied.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MARKED ARTICLE

HERE then was one undoubted fact; the deer had been shot by two different guns. Ira cogitated upon this fact and tried to make up his mind what he would do next, or whether he would do anything. And probably he would not have done anything if it had not been for the newspaper which he delivered to Aunt Mira. She did not give him this to read for she still maintained a demeanor of coldness toward this arch-seducer. But he found the paper on the sitting room table and read the marked article.

"BRIDGEBORO SCOUTS CONTEST FOR ROTARY CLUB AWARD," the heading declared. The article below ran:

"Great excitement prevails among our local scout troops as a result of the splendid offer of the Rotary Club of our town to send a scout to Yellowstone National Park next summer. This rare opportunity

is offered to the scout of Rockvale County who, in the opinion of the Club's Committee, performed the most conspicuous good turn during the past summer. Each of the three troops in Bridgeboro has elected a scout for this contest. All of the deeds presented for the league's consideration reflect great credit on the young heroes who performed them.

"The First Bridgeboro Troop, our oldest and largest local unit, presents Warde Hollister as candidate for the rare treat of a trip to the Yellowstone. Warde did a great stunt at Temple Camp during the summer involving both prowess and generous spirit and the First Troop scouts are moving heaven and earth to secure for him the award which will be a reflected honor to their splendid organization."

On the same page with this article was a blank area surrounding an advertisement and availing himself of this space, Westy had written:

Dear Aunt Mira:—

Maybe you'll be sorry I can't go to Yellowstone Park because I had to do something else with my money. Dad says for me to forget about going to Yellowstone. This article shows you how, sort of, I will go anyway probably. Because in a scout

troop all the scouts are sort of like one scout so if Hollie goes it will almost be the same as if I went, and I'll hear all about it anyway. So please don't feel sorry because I can't go to the Yellowstone. I had a dandy time at the farm. Give my regards to Ira.

WESTY.

When Ira had finished his unauthorized perusal he lighted his pipe. Ira could smoke and do anything else at the same time—except read. Reading required all his effort and when he read, his pipe always took advantage of his preoccupation to go out. When he had relighted it, he stuffed his hands as far down as possible in his trousers pockets and went out and gazed at the landscape. But he did not care anything about the landscape.

"He's—one—all round—little—prince," he mused aloud. *"He's jes one nat'ral born little prince!* They don't make 'em, that scout club, them as is like that jes has ter be born that way. By gol, I'd like ter know what the little rascal act'ally did do."

He came to the conclusion that what the little rascal had actually done was to collaborate with

Luke Meadows in the adventurous exploit of killing the deer and then allowed himself to be frightened into assuming all the guilt and paying the fine. Ira was artless enough, and ignorant enough of scouting, to believe that this in itself would constitute a claim upon the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro.

"I ain't gon to see no kid gon out to the Yellowstone without them gents knowin' 'bout this here," mused Ira. "I'm a-gon ter look inter this mess summat. I ain't satisfied with the looks o' things."

For a few minutes longer he stood, his back against the house, smoking and considering. Then, delving into the abysmal depths of his trousers pocket he disinterred a formidable nickel watch which was innocent of chain or cord. He had exchanged a carved whale's tooth for it in some oriental sea town and it was his pride and boast. If Ira himself had always been as regular as this miniature town clock no one would have complained.

"I got jes about enough time ter ketch the six-twenty from Dawson's," he said. "I'm gone ter hev a look at this here Bridgeboro."

This was as far as he was willing to commit himself. He would go in the rôle of idle tourist. There remained only one thing to do and that was to

saunter out to the kitchen porch and reach his outlandish felt hat down from the peg which had been intended for a milk pail. If he had been going to South Africa, he would have done no more than this. But he did pay Bridgeboro the tribute of banging his hat against a porch stanchion to knock the loose dust out of it. Then he sauntered up the road toward Dawson's.

CHAPTER XXVII

ENTER THE CONTEMPTIBLE SCOUNDREL

At eight o'clock that evening, an evening destined to be memorable in the annals of local scouting, Ira Hasbrook stood upon the porch of the Martin home and, having pushed the electric button, knocked out the contents of his pipe against the rail preparatory to entering.

He wore khaki trousers which in some prehistoric era had been brown, a blue flannel shirt and an old strap from a horse harness by way of a belt. He was not in the least perturbed, but bore himself with an easy-going demeanor which had a certain quality that suggested that nothing less than an earthquake could ruffle it. He was not admitted to the house by the correct man servant and seemed quite content to wait on the porch until Mr. Martin (whom he purposed to honor with a call) should make known his pleasure touching the scene of their interview.

"You want to see me; what is it?" that gentleman demanded curtly.

"You Mr. Martin, huh? Westy's father?"

"Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Well," drawled Ira, "you can do a turn fer him, mebbe; and that'll be doin' somethin' fer me. I'm down off the farm up yonder—up by Dawson's."

"Oh, you mean you work for Mr. Nelson?"

"By turns, when I'm in the country. The kid happen to be home?"

"No, sir, he's not," said Mr. Martin curtly, "but I think I've heard of you. What is your business here?"

"Well, I never was in no business exactly, as the feller says." Ira drawled out. "Kid's gone ter the meetin', huh?"

"I believe he has," said Mr. Martin briskly. "Did Mr. Nelson send you here? If there is anything you have to say to my son I think it would be better for you to say it to me."

"That's as might be," said Ira easily. "Would yer want that I should talk to yer here?"

Mr. Martin stepped aside to let the caller pass within. Ira wiped his feet but paid no other tribute, nor, indeed, paid the slightest heed to the rather

sumptuous surroundings in which he found himself. He followed the lord of the establishment into the library and seated himself in one of the big leather chairs. Mr. Martin did not trouble himself to present Ira when his wife and daughter (fearful of some newly disclosed sequel to Westy's escapade) stole into the room and unobtrusively seated themselves in a corner.

"Well, sir, what is it?" said Mr. Martin authoritatively.

"Well," drawled Ira, "it's 'bout yer son shootin' a deer."

"We know about that," said Mr. Martin coldly.

"Yer don't happen ter know if he used the rifle since, do you?"

At this there was an audible titter from Doris.

"Oh, yes, I know very well that he hasn't," said the official jailer, "I have it under lock and key."

"I'd like ter git a squint at that there gun."

"That would be impossible," said Mr. Martin.

"Yes?"

"Is there any claim that the gun doesn't belong to my son? That he——"

"There's a notion he ain't been tellin' the whole

gol blamed truth 'bout that there shootin' an' I'm here ter kinder look over the matter, as the feller says."

"Did you come here to charge my son with lying?"

"Well, as you might say, *no*. I come here ter charge him with bein' a little rascal of a prince. But *of* course if I thought he was a liar I'd tell 'im so and I'd tell you so. Jes the same as if I thought you was a fool or a liar I'd tell yer so."

"Isn't he perfectly splendid," Doris whispered in her mother's ear. "Isn't he picturesque? Oh, I think he's just adorable."

"Well, now, my man," said Mr. Martin, considerably jarred by his caller's frank declaration, "what is it? I think I've heard of you and I think if it wasn't for you that murderous toy wouldn't be locked up in that closet there." Ira glanced toward the family dungeon. "As I understand it, from what Mrs. Nelson says, you got my boy's head full of nonsense and he ran amuck. He told the truth and confessed it and lost a hundred dollars and his gun and a trip out west. And the gun's locked up in that closet where it will never do any

more harm. It will never shoot any more deer in season or out of season—I suppose you've shot them both ways."

"Yes, sir, I have," drawled Ira, "but I never used more than one gun at a time; I never dropped an animal with two different kinds of bullets like your boy did——"

Mr. Martin looked surprised.

"I was thinkin'," said Ira, not giving Mr. Martin a chance to comment upon this mystery, "that maybe not knowin' much 'bout guns and bein' sceered of 'em—I can always mostly spot folks that's daffy 'bout firearms—I was thinking maybe you was just crazy fool enough when you was mad ter lock that murderous toy up while it was loaded. *Of* course if you done that you can't *ex*actly say it won't do no more harm."

This was exactly what Mr. Martin had done and a titter from his daughter reminded him that he was at a slight disadvantage.

"I'd like ter see whether both shots has been fired outer that gun," Ira drawled on. "I'd jes kind of sorter like to look it over. And while I'm at it, I'll take out the cartridge that I think is still in it. Then it can't bite. Maybe I'll be able ter tell yer

somethin' or other when I get through. Now you jes get that gun out without any more foolin' around or else yer don't deserve ter be the father o' that kid. Get it out an' don't waste no more time; them gents is startin' a meetin' up yonder."

CHAPTER XXVIII

PROOFS

Ira Hasbrook took no notice of the tribute paid him by the mother and daughter and father who clustered about him evidently not in the least afraid of the gun now that it was in his hands. Even Mr. Martin contemplated it without a quiver. Upon the library table lay one cartridge. The other had done its good turn.

"Yer see this here is one of them repeaters," said Ira. "'Tain't goin' ter hurt yer. Yer see these here two cartridges I got in my pocket? They come outer the deer. They ain't the same size, yer see? Two guns. The one I jes took out matches that there little one outer my pocket. This here big one came outer another gun—that ain't no repeater. Now looka here, here's what tells the story—the gol blamed little rascal of a double barrel prince! Looka here—feel on the end of that barrel. Powder.

"Feel, mister, 'twon't bite yer. Yer know what that means? That means yer a proud father. I wasn't gone ter shake hands with yer, but gol blame it, I think I will! Feel it! Smell it! Powder, all right. That means your boy was—about—gol, that toy o' his wasn't six inches from that there deer when he shot it in the head." He scrutinized and felt of something near the end of the barrel. "Blood even! See that; that's a hair! I knowed I'd ketch the little rascal. *Mister, that boy o' yours shot that animal ter put it outer its suffering.*"

There was a moment's pause as they clustered about Ira where he stood near the library table squinting curiously at the end of the barrel and gingerly examining it with one finger. And only one sound broke the silence; that was when an almost inaudible *"oh"* of astonishment and admiration escaped from Doris. "It's wonderful," she said more clearly after a pause.

"Be sure yer sins'll find yer out, as the feller says," drawled Ira.

"If it hadn't been for you——" Mrs. Martin began.

"All right, mister," Ira laughed, "yer don't need

ter be scared of her, she's empty. The only thing's goner do any damage now is me. I'm goner shoot up th' Rotary Club. Now where's this here meetin' anyway? I'm a goner look it over."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RALLY

The assembly hall of the Bridgeboro High School presented a gala scene. The whole thing had come about unexpectedly; it had been an "inspiration" as Pee-wee would have said. The local newspaper at the instigation of several public-spirited individuals and organizations of town, had stirred up a festival spirit in the interest of the Boy Scouts which must have surprised the kindly gentlemen of the Rotary Club who had certainly never expected that the award they had offered would be made the occasion of a public rally.

But Mrs. Gibson of the Woman's Club had seen the opportunity for a "real Scout night," and the giving of the coveted award had been hooked up with a well-planned rally. The Rotary Club was in it, the Woman's Club was in it, the Campfire Girls were in it, the Y.M.C.A. was in it, and Pee-wee Harris was in it. He was not only in it, he was all

over it. Most of the troops in the county had lately returned from their summer outings and they blew into Bridgeboro, tanned and enthusiastic. Not all troops had elected candidates for the great award, but all were interested. It was Scout Night in Bridgeboro.

"Our troop is going to sit in the front row," shouted Pee-wee; "and listen—everybody keep still —*listen*—when Warde gets called up on the stage—that's the way they're going to do—when he—shut up and listen—when he gets called up on the stage, don't start shouting till I do. When I shout——"

"I never heard you stop shouting," said Roy.

"I have to start in order to stop, don't I?" Pee-wee roared. "How can I shout without being still first?"

"How are you going to get still?" Roy shot back.

"You leave it to me," yelled Pee-wee. "Don't anybody shout till I do. Then when I start everybody shout—wait a minute—this is what you all have to shout:

Yell, yell, yell,
Yell, yell, yell,

Yell, yell, yell,
Yellowstone!

I invented it because it's got a lot of yells in it."

"He thinks Yellowstone Park is named after a yell," shouted Roy.

The First Bridgeboro Troop did sit in the front row and for a while Pee-wee was silent—while he finished eating an apple. The first six or eight rows were filled with scouts and their patrol pennants raised here and there made an inspiring and festive show. Behind them was the regular audience. On the stage a khaki tent had been pitched with logs piled outside it and a huge iron pot hanging over them upon a rough crane.

"Oh, boy, I wish that was filled with hunter's stew," Pee-wee whispered to Dorry Benton who sat next to him. "Yum, yum, I wish I was on that platform."

"He's so hungry he could eat an imitation meal," Dorry whispered to Roy.

"Tell him to wait till the curtain comes down with a roll and he can eat that," whispered Roy.

There was singing, and a high scout official from National Headquarters made a speech. The bronze

cross was given to one proud scout, the Temple life-saving medal to another. A patrol from Little Valley gave a skilful demonstration of first aid. The Boy Scout Band from Northvale played several pieces; they had a very snappy little band, the Northvale Troop.

Then, a scout was blindfolded and led to the tent. He promised to jump up as soon as he heard the least sound of approach. Then a barefooted scout stole up, while the audience waited in suspense, and had actually started removing the bandage from the other boy's eyes before the latter knew he was near. This brought great applause. The Camp-fire Girls sang in chorus and gave some interesting demonstrations. It was a pretty good program.

It was after ten o'clock when Mr. Atwater, of the Rotary Club, arose from among those seated on the stage and, drawing a batch of papers from his pocket, started to address the audience.

"Three cheers for the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro!" some one called. And three rousing cheers were given for that organization.

"Hurrah for Yellowstone Park!" one called.

"Hurrah for the scout that we don't know who

he is!" another shouted, and there was much laughter.

"Yes, we do know, too!" arose the thunderous voice of Scout Harris.

"We'll all know very soon," laughed Mr. Atwater, "if you'll give me a chance to speak."

A certain atmosphere of tenseness seemed to pervade the front rows of the assembly hall. Scouts became restless, there were whispering and demands for quiet. Mr. Atwater smilingly waited.

Then silence.

CHAPTER XXX

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

"My good friends," said Mr. Atwater, "Shakespeare tells us that some are born great and some have greatness thrust upon them. The Rotary Club seems to have greatness thrust upon it. In an evil moment, one of our members suggested giving a trip to the Yellowstone Park as a reward for the best scout good turn performed in this county during the past summer. Through the press scout troops were invited to elect members eligible, by reason of their deeds, to compete for this award. The Rotary Club had no expectation of being dragged into the light of day and fulfilling its promise before the multitude——"

"Don't you be scared," shouted Pee-wee.

"I think I can get through with it," laughed Mr. Atwater, amid much laughter. "I have seen much to-night and it is my pleasure and pride to put one boy scout in the way of seeing more—that great,

vast wonderland of the west, the Yellowstone National Park! (Great applause.) To him that hath shall be given, as the Bible tells us. The Rotary Club cannot make a hero. But I think it can pick one. And that it has tried to do impartially, fairly. (Applause.)

"The trouble with the Boy Scouts in Rockvale County is that they have too many heroes; it isn't a question of finding one, but more a question of weeding them out. (Laughter.)

"When I was a boy I got a medal for washing my hands and face each day (including under my ears) and twice on Sundays. I kept up with that ordeal for a period of weeks and then I got the cleanliness medal—and lost it. I have always been sorry that I washed my hands and face each day—including under my ears. (Great laughter.) Because now I have nothing to show for it. (Cheers and uproarious laughter.)

"So when this proposition of an award came up I said, 'If we're going to give an award at all, let's give something that can't fall out of a boy's pocket. (Laughter.) Let's give something that he can't swap off for a jack-knife—something that the teacher can't take away from him.' "

"You said it!" shouted Pee-wee.

"When I was a kid (anticipatory laughter), a century or two ago, everything I had sooner or later fell into the hands of my teacher. (Broad smile from Principal Starky on the platform.) So I said let's give this young hero something he'll always have! Let's give him mountains, and geysers and forests and grizzly bears, and lots to eat——"

"Oh, boy!" said Pee-wee.

"And if anybody can get those things away from him let them have them."

If every laughing face in that audience had not been directed at the genial speaker who had captivated all, perhaps some might have noticed the boy who sat in silence looking wistfully at the speaker and listening intently.

As Mr. Atwater passed on to more serious talk, that boy's attention seemed to concentrate and become tense. He saw neither Roy on his right hand, nor Warde Hollister on his left, only the stage and the speaker, and he seemed to be in a sort of trance. Only once did he speak and that was when (under the spell of some alluring phrase of the speaker's) he said to Warde, "I hope you do get it, it's our

troop." Then he said to himself. "If it isn't my trip it's my troop." Further than this, no one, not even the restless and whispering Pee-wee, could draw his attention from the speaker.

"The Yellowstone National Park," Mr. Atwater continued, "is Uncle Sam's great playground. There you are welcome. The geysers jump up when they see you coming; the grizzly bears hug you to death. (Laughter.) You can shoot the rapids but you can't shoot anything else. You can leave your gun at home, young fellow, because that wonderland belongs to the deer just as much as it belongs to you. You can't kill deer in the Yellowstone."

Westy winced. Was the speaker looking at him? Of course not—foolish, sensitive boy. . . .

"Now, one of you scouts is going out to the Yellowstone next summer, on the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro. The amount of money you will have to take is just *not one cent!* You're going to stay there for a month and bang around—all expenses paid. You're going to come back and say that old Uncle Sam has some back-yard to play in. (Laughter.) You're going to get onto a friendly basis with forest rangers and bears, and deer, and trout fishing and what all. No medal! No gewgaw to sew

on your sleeve! No gold piece to buy candy with! Just a trip to Uncle Sam's Wonderland, the Yellowstone National Park! (Great applause.)

"Now who is going to have this trip? Six gentlemen and four ladies have decided and they're all here on the platform. (Applause.) And they did the best they could to decide. It becomes my duty now to announce the winner of this award. Edwin Carlisle of the Second Westboro Troop will please stand up."

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOOTIN' UP THE MEETIN'

A TENSE silence prevailed. Pee-wee gasped, speechless. Even the exuberant Roy stared. *"What — do — you — know — about — that!"* Doc Carson whispered to Artie Van Arlen. As Westy had been staring spellbound all along, no turn in his thoughts was visible in his features. Warde Hollister, of all the boys in the troop, seemed unperturbed. Level-headed and sensible scout that he was, he had let the others do the hoping, and the shouting.

"We don't get it," whispered Dorry Benton.

"Look!" whispered Wig Weigand to Warde.

But the figure that came sauntering down the aisle was not Edwin Carlisle, the hero. A queer enough figure he looked in that representative assemblage in his faded trousers and blue flannel shirt. Rough, uncouth and unaccustomed to such environment, he still bore a certain air of serene heedlessness to all this pomp and circumstance, as if he were con-

cerned only with that which was really significant and vital. One could not say of him that he *seemed* at home, for that would be paying the place an unconscious tribute. His calm assurance and easy strength seemed to imply that the whole world was his home and that one place was much like another to him.

He paused half-way down the aisle and then for the first time the boys in the front row saw him, just as he began to speak. Westy Martin stared aghast like one seeing a ghost and his heart thumped in his throat as he listened.

"I d'no's I oughter speak out 'n meetin', as the feller says, but I got somethin' ter say in this here jamboree."

A silence like the silence of the grave followed. One astonished girl (it might have been Doris Martin) said something undistinguishable in an amazed, audible whisper.

"I been in the Yallerstone," drawled the speaker, "an' I like what you said—you gent. But I'm interested in somethin' bigger 'n the Yallerstone an' that's a kid yer got here. He's big enough ter make the Yallerstone look like one er them there city

grass-plots I see. I'm talkin' ter you, mister, an' before you go ter makin' any plunge yer better listen. I was goner speak out when you says somethin' 'baout shootin' deer, but I didn'.

"I'm down off a farm up Dawson way owned by his uncle—this here kid I'm talkin' 'baout. And if he's settin' roun' here anywheres an' hears me tell any lies 'baout him he can up an' call me a liar. Then I'll let him have—jes—two—shots—that'll shut 'im up."

"Gracious!" Some lady said shuddering. "Is he a lunatic?"

"Two shots, one big and one little I got in my pocket and I'll tell him to his face that he's a little rascal of a prince. Yer happen ter be anywheres around, Westy?"

Silence, save for nervously fidgeting figures and people down in front turning and craning to see this strange apparition.

"Stand up, Westy, cause yer got ter go through with it and I'm down off the farm ter take care o' that. Some o' you youngsters make him stand up, wherever he is."

They made him stand up, and there he stood,

nervous, ashamed, gulping. He longed to be near Ira, to say "This is my friend," yet he could not bring himself even to look at him.

"There yer are—thanks, you boys. Now, mister, that there kid had a hunderd dollars saved up ter go to Yallerstone Park; he worked fer it, chorin' roun' on the farm, helpin' me hayin' an' what all. He starts home with his hunderd dollars an' sees a deer in the woods what's been dropped but ain't killed —don't leave 'im sit down, you boys.

"Now, mister, he shoots that deer in the head and kills it ter end its sufferings. He don't know no more 'baout shootin' than a drunken maniac but at two or three inches he killed his deer. All right, mister. Then he goes ter Barrett's, a little settlement up our way. I d'no what he goes fer. But I'm thinkin' he goes ter see the man that shot that deer first off. Leastways, when that man got the blame like he deserved, this kid he up and says it was *him* killed the deer. So 'twas, the little rascal, but you see *how* 'twas. Well, he gets arrested an' he pays out his precious hunderd dollars and comes home and says *he* killed a deer and gets a good tongue lashin' and loses his gun, but he sticks fast.

"Now all I come here fer now is ter let you folks

in onter that stunt o' his an' ask you if he gets his trip to the Yallerstone that he cheated himself out of, or not. I don't know nuthin' 'baout kind turns 'cause I ain't never did none, but I wanter know if this here kid gets his trip out Yallerstone way or not. Now, if I'm lyin' he'll tell yer so, 'cause I understand these scout fellers don't lie. I jes wanter know if he gets his trip out Yallerstone way or not."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BOY EDWIN CARLISLE

CONSTERNATION reigned. In the front row, where the First Bridgeboro Troop sat, confusion prevailed. Pee-wee, in accordance with the old precept of "Off with the old love, on with the new," forgot for the moment Warde's chagrin and shouted uproariously for Westy.

"It's going to be in our troop anyway!" he yelled. *"It's just the same only different!"*

And meanwhile, a trim-looking boy, Edwin Carlisle, was standing in the audience waiting patiently and smiling, somewhat embarrassed.

Mr. Atwater turned and conferred with his colleagues on the platform. Pee-wee, restrained by his nearest neighbors, subsided into silence. Westy (probably more utterly wretched than any one in the hall) tried to silence excited questioners. "Who is he?" "Is it true?" "Is he crazy?" "Did you ever see him before?" "I bet it's the truth!" These

and similar whispered comments were showered upon him and he could only keep looking about sheepishly, as if he were ashamed to have the spectators behold this fuss.

The boy, Edwin Carlisle, standing quietly among his sitting colleagues some distance off, made a rather pathetic picture. His was not an easy rôle but he bore himself with a demeanor of patience and good humor.

And meanwhile, the outlandish stranger who had "shot up" the meeting remained like a statue half-way down the aisle calmly awaiting an answer to his question. Once it seemed as if he were on the point of lighting his pipe, but he did not do that.

It was Mr. Atwater who put an end to this rather embarrassing interval.

"Just be seated—a few moments—my boy," he said, addressing the Carlisle boy. Then to Ira he said, "Suppose you come up here on the platform, my friend, if you don't mind; we'd like to speak with you."

Ira did not seem to mind. He ambled the rest of the way down the aisle, turned to the left past a troop of scouts who stared at him as if he were a trapper or a cowboy, and up the steps to the stage.

Then for the first time everybody saw him. Mrs. Ashly (conspicuous in the Woman's Club) arose as if on a sudden impulse and shook hands with him cordially. He looked out of place but not ill at ease. He had walked through the audience as a man might walk through a forest.

Scarcely was he on the platform when something happened. A rather large man, with a big, round, rugged face stood up in the audience. He was an elderly man and dangled a pair of glasses as he spoke.

"May I join you ladies and gentlemen on the platform?" he asked.

"You bet you may," came the genial response from Mr. Atwater. "If we had known you were there, Mr. ——"

"It's Mr. Temple! It's Mr. Temple!" whispered Pee-wee excitedly. "Oh, boy, it's Mr. Temple! Now there's going to be something doing—*shhh!*"

"Listen to who's saying *shhh!*" whispered Roy.

"Shhhh, there's going to be something doing, there's going to be something doing," said Pee-wee.

"There is," said Roy grimly. "You're going to be thrown out if you don't shut up."

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. TEMPLE'S LUCKY NUMBER

Mr. John Temple, philanthropist, founder of Temple Camp and friend of scouting, had evidently sensed a delicate and perhaps difficult situation, and had gone to the rescue. He was given a fine welcome on the stage and the burst of applause by the audience showed that his public spirit and generosity were well known.

Every town has its wealthy and distinguished citizen; the good work of such men lives after them in libraries and hospitals. Mr. Temple was Bridgeboro's most distinguished character—next to Pee-wee. And even Pee-wee paid him the compliment of declaring, "He buys more railroads every day than I do ice cream cones." If he did, he must have owned practically all the roads in the country.

After an interval of suspense, which was seen in an acute stage among the scouts, Mr. Atwater turned

to the audience and said, "Stand up again, Edwin Carlisle."

The demeanor of this Carlisle boy was scoutish in the highest degree. Many were already wondering what he had done to warrant his selection as the winner of the great award. He had been on the point of receiving it when Ira had "shot up" the meeting. He had stood patiently and cheerfully waiting while he saw the honor that was his slipping away from him with every sentence of Ira's drawling talk.

He had reseated himself with no sign of disappointment or resentment when told to do so. And now he stood again among his comrades, cheerful, willing, obedient. And there he stood with Yellowstone Park dangling before his eyes and knew not what to think, but seemed content to abide by the issue. Mr. Temple had seen him (shrewd man that he was he had watched him amid the tumult when no one else had watched him) and Edwin Carlisle, scout of Westboro, was safe.

After a little while (it seemed an hour) Mr. Atwater withdrew from an earnestly whispered conference and stood up to address the audience again. Mr. Temple took a seat in the row of chairs facing

the audience. He seemed purposely to choose a seat beside Ira who sat, one knee over the other, bending forward with his arms about his knee. The hunched attitude was familiar to Westy and took him back to the kitchen porch at the farm where he had listened to Ira's dubious reminiscences. Mr. Temple spoke genially to him from time to time, and once laughed audibly at something Ira said. It might possibly have been the kidnapping episode.

"Westy Martin," said Mr. Atwater, "stand up."

Westy stood, all bewildered. He was so close to the stage that one nervous hand rested upon the molding which bordered it. A curious contrast he seemed to the boy standing in the darkness of the hall some distance back. But Ira Hasbrook caught his eye and winked a kind of lowering wink at him, and Westy smiled back.

"You heard what this man said, Martin; is it true?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"All true?"

"Y-yes—yes, it is."

"Well, then, my young friend, it becomes my privilege to inform you that you have won the award of the Rotary Club of Bridgeboro of a trip to the

Yellowstone National Park (great applause) next summer. Your troop is congratulated (process of gagging Pee-wee) and you have the unstinted and unanimous commendation of this committee for your generous and self-sacrificing act. (Applause.) Your friend Mr. Hasbrook wishes me to say how fortunate it was that you had your rifle with you and were not afraid to use it.

"You will be glad to know that Mr. John Temple (who delights in taking glory away from other people) has made a proposition which somewhat amplifies the Club's award. Indeed it puts our poor Club somewhat in the shadow. He says that three is his lucky number. (Laughter.) And he, therefore, proposes that a scout in your troop of whose exploit honorable mention was to have been made, Warde Hollister, accompany you to the Yellowstone at his expense.

"The scout to whom the honor was to have been awarded, Edwin Carlisle of Westboro, receives also honorable mention for his exploit in putting out a forest fire. He too is to be a recipient of Mr. Temple's munificence and is likewise awarded the honor of accompanying you.

"You, Martin, go as the Rotary Club's winning

candidate. Carlisle and Hollister go with you as the two winners of special mention for their exploits and are sent by Mr. Temple. I have suggested to him that you be called the Temple Trio, but he insists that the name of the Rotary Club shall be used. Your friend Mr. Hasbrook suggests that since probably none of you know how to shoot, you be called the Bungling Bunch." (Great laughter suddenly increased to uproar by the thunderous voice of Scout Harris.)

"It's just like I said it would be, only more so!" he shouted. "It's—it's—it's—it's like two helpings of dessert! We're going to have two of them in our troop! That shows even when I'm mistaken I'm right!"

And amid the tumult of cheers and laughter, Edwin Carlisle, scout of Westboro, stood smiling, silent, obedient, till Mr. Atwater called to him that he might sit down.

So it happened that Westy Martin not only went to the Yellowstone, but went in company of two companions the following summer. It was natural that in the long interval of waiting these three scouts should strike up a sort of special comradeship, and by spring they were inseparable.

At last the big day came, and they were speeding westward in a comfortable Pullman car, beguiling the tedious hours of travel by matching their wits against a rather amusing stranger, a traveling man, whose acquaintance they had made on the train.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WESTWARD HO

"GRIZZLIES? Oh, hundreds of them! But they're away back up in the mountains; you won't see them."

"They're about the fiercest animals there, aren't they?" one of the boys asked.

"Well," drawled the traveling man, working his cigar over to the corner of his mouth and contemplating the boys in the shrewd way he had. "I don't know about that. The wallerpagoes are pretty runctious. But they don't bother you unless you bother them. Now you take a skehinkum, one of the big kind——"

"You mean the kind with the whitish black fur?" Warde Hollister laughed.

The traveling man worked his cigar over to the opposite corner of his mouth and looked at Warde with an expression of humorous skepticism. "Don't you learn about them in the boy scouts?" he asked.

"Oh, positively," said Warde. "They're all right as long as you don't feed them on gum-drops."

The traveling man was having the time of his life with the three boys. They called him the traveling man because they thought he looked and talked like one. They had ventured to ask him his business and he had told them that it was starting revolutions in South America. He had even hinted that he was in a plot to blow up the Panama Canal, and had asked them not to mention this to their parents. He had said that if they kept his secret he might later let them in on a scheme to restore North America to its rightful owners, the Indians. "Wrap it up and we'll take it and deliver it to them," Warde Hollister had said.

Throughout the long journey they had wondered and speculated as to what and who this amusing stranger really was. And they had decided in conference that he was a traveling salesman. He seemed to have a hearty contempt for the boasted prowess of boy scouts, but the three boys did not dislike him for that. In the pleasant art of jollying they had been able to hold their own. And he seemed to like them for that. But he would not take them seriously.

They had told him about tracking and signaling and outdoor resourcefulness and woods lore and he had been pleased to poke fun at them about their skill and knowledge. He had appeared to derive much entertainment from this pastime. Pee-wee Harris (Raven and mascot) would have been able to "handle" him, but unfortunately Pee-wee was not on this trip. So the responsibility for defending the dignity of scouting fell to Warde Hollister, Edwin Carlisle and Westy Martin.

"And bandits?" Westy asked.

"Bandits? Oceans of them! They spurt right up out of the geysers," said the stranger.

"What could be sweeter?" said Eddie Carlisle.

"Can't you answer a civil question?" Westy asked, the least bit testily.

"Things have to be civil to suit you, hey?" the traveling man said. "Anything uncivilized and——"

"We're asking you if it's true that there are train robbers and men like that in the park?" Westy said.

"Sure there are," said the stranger. "Where do you suppose they buy their post cards to send home?"

The three boys seemed on the point of giving him up as a hopeless case.

"Why? Do you want to go hunting them?" the stranger asked.

"We wouldn't be the first boy scouts to help the authorities," Warde said.

This seemed to amuse the traveling man greatly. He contemplated the three of them with a kind of good-humored, sneering skepticism. Then he was moved to be serious.

"Well, I'll tell you how it is," he said. "The Yellowstone Park is really two places; see? There's the wild Yellowstone and the tame Yellowstone. The park is full of grizzlies and rough characters of the wild and fuzzy west but they don't patronize the sightseeing autos. They're kind of modest and diffident and they stay back in the mountains where you won't see them. You know train robbers as a rule are sort of bashful.

"You kids are just going to see the park and you'll have your hands full, too. You'll sit in a nice comfortable automobile and the man will tell you what to look at and you'll see geysers and things and canyons and a lot of odds and ends

and you'll have the time of your lives. There's a picture shop between Norris and the Canyon; you drop in there and see if you can get a post card showing Pelican Cone. That'll give you an idea of where *I'll* be. You can think of me up in the wilderness while you're listening to the concert in the Old Faithful Inn. That's where they have the big geyser in the back yard—spurts once an hour, Johnny on the spot. I suppose," added the stranger with that shrewd, skeptical look which was beginning to tell on the boys, "that if you kids really saw a grizzly you wouldn't stop running till you hit New York. I think you said scouts know how to run.

"We wouldn't stop there," said the Carlisle boy; "we'd be so scared that we'd just take a running jump across the Atlantic Ocean and land in Europe."

"What would you really do now if you met a bandit?" the stranger asked. "*Shoot him dead* I suppose, like Deadwood Dick in the dime novels."

"We don't read dime novels," said Westy.

"But just the same," said Warde, "it might be the worse for that bandit. Didn't you read——"

The traveling man laughed outright.

"All right, you can laugh," said Westy, a trifle annoyed.

The stranger stuck his feet up between Warde and Westy, who sat in the seat facing and put his arm on the farther shoulder of Eddie Carlisle who sat beside him. Then he worked his unlighted cigar across his mouth and tilted it at an angle which somehow seemed to bespeak a good-natured contempt of the boy scouts.

"Just between ourselves," said he, "who takes care of the publicity stuff for the boy scouts anyway? Who puts all this stuff in the newspapers about boy scouts finding lost people and saving lives and putting out forest fires and plugging up holes in dams and saving towns from floods and all that sort of thing? I read about one kid who found a German wireless station during the war——"

"That was true," snapped Warde, stung into some show of real anger by this flippant slander. "I suppose you don't know that a scout out west in Illinois——"

"You mean out *east* in Illinois," laughed the stranger. "You're in the wild and woolly west and you don't even know it. I suppose if you were

dropped from the train right now you'd start west for Chicago."

The three boys laughed for it did seem funny to think of Illinois being far east of them. They felt a bit chagrined too at the realization that, after all, their view of the rugged wonders they were approaching was to be enjoyed from the rather prosaic vantage point of a sightseeing auto. What would Buffalo Bill or Kit Carson have said to that?

The traveling man looked out of the window and said, "We'll hit Emigrant pretty soon if it's still there. The cyclones out here blow the villages around so half the time the engineer don't know where to look for them. I remember Barker's Corners used to be right behind a big tree in Montana and it got blown away and they found it two years afterward in Arizona."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE STRANGER

EMIGRANT. The last stop on the long, long journey from New York. The last stop till the thundering train would reach the Gardiner entrance of the Yellowstone National Park. They were within thirty miles of that wonderland.

Westy was glad that there was one more station to be reached before his dream should be a reality. His nerves were so much on edge that the one, poor, little station of Emigrant would act as a sort of valve to relieve him of the tension that he felt. He was glad that they weren't going to reach their destination quite yet—he was too excited. Yes, he was glad there was just one more station. Then, *then*——

As for the traveling man, he seemed to be about as excited and anticipatory as if he were strolling across the street to buy another cigar.

The train thundered along through the rugged Montana country, its screeching whistle now and again echoing from the towering mountains. On, on, on it rushed with a kind of disdainful preoccupation, going straight about its business, circling the frowning heights, crossing torrents, unhindered, invincible. Did anybody live or even venture in those wild mountains, Westy wondered. Were there trails there? Could it be that grizzly bears heard in their fastnesses the shriek of that steel monster that was rushing straight to its end?

Only this roaring, swerving, thundering, rushing train stood between Westy Martin and those uninhabited wilds. No smudge signal would save him there. No approved device for helping the lost pilgrim in distress would serve him in that endless, rugged wilderness. The leather seat of the smoking car seemed good to him.

"Who's going to look after you kids?" their traveling acquaintance asked.

The boys, particularly Warde, did not like to hear it put that way but he answered, "The auto is going to meet us at Gardiner; there's a scout official who's going to be there and they'll call our names out. They're going to take us to the hotel

at Mammoth Hot Springs. After that we go on a kind of a tour. It's all planned out for us."

"Well, I'll be with you as far as the Springs," said the stranger, "so if you don't make connections all right I'll get things fixed up for you. How the dickens did you three kids happen to beat it out here anyway?"

"If we told you, you'd only laugh," said Ed Carlisle. "We did some stunts, that's how. We——"

"Don't you tell him unless he tells us what *he's* doing out here," Warde said.

"All right, that's a go," laughed the stranger.

"I bet you're just selling things to tourists," said Westy. "I bet you're bringing a lot of souvenirs of Yellowstone Park from New York to sell out here."

"Yes, and how about you?" the stranger asked.

"We're sent by the Rotary Club," said Warde, "because we did three things to win the award."

The traveling man cocked his head sideways and listened in a humorously skeptical way which was very annoying. "You found somebody who was lost in the woods?" he queried.

"No, we didn't find somebody who was lost in the woods," Warde said somewhat testily.

"No? Well then they sent you because you're the only three boy scouts that haven't done that. I congratulate you, here's my hand."

"This fellow, Westy Martin," said Warde, "killed a deer that somebody else had shot because he wanted to put it out of its suffering and he let people think he was the one that shot it; he did that so they wouldn't punish the other person. But it was found out so they gave him the good turn award. This other fellow put out a forest fire and I took a long hike and got a job for somebody. So now what are you doing out here? You didn't even tell us your name."

"Well, that's very nice," said their acquaintance; "my name is Madison C. Wilde and I'm mixed up with the Educational Films——"

"You're in the movies?" shouted Ed.

"Just at present," said Mr. Madison C. Wilde. "I'm in the business of getting snap-shots of wild animals to show you fellows when you happen to have thirty cents to buy a ticket. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"I'd like to know if you're really going up on that mountain, Pelican Cove, like you said," Westy asked.

"What do you suppose I've been hanging around Washington, D. C. for the last two weeks for?" Mr. Wilde asked. "I'd rather stalk grizzlies on Pelican Cone than stalk National Park Directors in Washington. I'd rather go after pictures than permits, I can tell you that if anybody should ask you. Grizzlies are bad enough, but park directors"—he shook his head in despair—"that bunch in Washington," and shook his head again.

The boys stared at him. In their minds the pursuit of wild animals, for whatever purpose, was associated with buckskin and cartridge-laden belts. Yet here was a little man with a bristly mustache whose only weapon was an unlighted cigar innocently pointing toward heaven. They had already imbibed enough of the atmosphere of the legendary west to be somewhat shocked at the thought of this brisk, little man, with all the prosaic atmosphere of the city about him, going into the wilds to stalk grizzlies. He did not seem at all like Buffalo Bill.

"Gee whiz!" ejaculated Westy. "I thought you were a salesman or something like that."

Mr. Madison C. Wilde gave him a whimsical look and proceeded to draw forth from an inside pocket a mammoth wallet while the three boys

stared speechless. Could this man be just fooling them? The wallet was formidable enough to stagger any grizzly. It was bulging with money, which to the boys seemed to confirm the stranger's connection with the movies, where fabulous sums are possessed and handed about. Mr. Wilde was as deliberate with his wallet as any hunter of the woolly west could possibly have been with his gun. He screwed his cigar over to the end of his mouth, tilted it to an almost vertical position, then closing one eye he explored the caves and fastnesses of his wallet with the other.

His quest eventually resulted in the capture of a paper which he brought forth out of a veritable jungle of bills and documents. "Here we are," said he, tenderly unfolding the document.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN IMPORTANT PAPER

"With the exception of the Declaration of Independence," said Mr. Wilde, "this is the most valuable paper in the world."

He handed it to Westy and the three boys, reading it together, saw that it was a permit issued by the director of the National Park Service at Washington to Mr. Alexander Creston, President of the Educational Film Company of New York to "dispatch employees of said Educational Film Company into such remote sections of the Yellowstone National Park as should be designated by the local park authorities for the purpose of securing photographs of the wild life, the use of traps and firearms being strictly prohibited. This permit expires——" And so forth and so forth. It concluded with the signature of the director of the National Park Service.

"Gee williger!" said Westy.

"Talking about stalking!" said Ed.

"No wonder you laugh at us," said Warde.

"Did you ever try stalking officials in Washington?" Mr. Wilde asked.

"We never stalked anything but robins and—and turtles and things like that," said Warde with a note of self-disgust in his voice.

"Never hit the red tape trail, hey? Well I guess turtles are pretty near as slow as Washington officials. I've been just exactly three weeks in Washington stalking this permit. Pretty good specimen, hey? That's more valuable than any grizzly, that is." He gazed at it with a look of whimsical affection and tucked it safely away in his wallet.

"It makes us feel kind of silly," said Westy, "to think of the kind of things you're going to do. I guess it's no wonder you make fun of us."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mr. Wilde not unkindly and with some approach to seriousness in his voice and manner, "you scout kids are all right. You get lots of fresh air and exercise and they're the best things for you. You go stalking Junebugs and caterpillars and it keeps you out of mischief. It's just the difference between the amateur and the professional. Now you kids go in for

these things as a pastime and that's all right. You're having the time of your lives. I'm for the boy scouts first, last and always. Stalking, tracking, etc., you make games out of all those things, and they're bully good games too. You're a pretty wide-awake bunch. But you'll never do these things in a serious way because you don't *have to*. Get me?"

"We don't get a chance," said Westy.

"Now you take a kid born out in the wilds—like this kid I've got waiting for me—Stove Polish or whatever his name is; he's an Indian."

"Who?" said Westy.

"What?" said Warde.

"Stove Polish?" gasped Ed.

"Shining Sun his name is," said Mr. Wilde. "Sounds like some kind of stove polish so I call him Stove Polish——"

"Where is he?" Westy asked, all excitement.

"He's waiting out at the Mammoth Hotel at Hot Springs with Mr. Creston; you'll see him. He's going up in the mountains with Clip and me. Now that kid is what you'd call a scout, the little rascal. He had to be a scout or starve. He didn't read his little book and raise up his hand and say

he was going to be a scout. He just got to be a scout because he had to.

"When you're in the Rocky Mountains a couple of hundred miles from the nearest town and the nearest town consists of one house, why, it's a case of you or the Rocky Mountains—which wins. See? If you stay lost you starve. If you don't know the signs you're out of luck. If you don't know what herbs to eat you don't get any dinner. If you can't tell where to look for a cave by the looks of the land, why then, you stay out in the rain and snow. See? If you haven't got a gun the only way you can catch a bird is to fool him. So he knows how to fool them. You fellows are scouts because you want to have a lot of fun. But Stove Polish is a scout because he wants to live; he has to be one, or he did have to up to a year or two ago. He knows how to run without making a sound because if he made a sound it would be all up with him."

"You said it," enthused Warde.

"Why, a couple of years or more ago," continued Mr. Wilde, "when that little rascal escaped from the Cheyenne reservation right back here a few miles, he got into the mountains and nobody heard

a word from him for a year and a half—never even sent a post card saying he was having a nice time or anything. Beaver Pete found him up in the mountains and brought him down to Yellowstone and Mr. Creston snapped him up like a used Cadillac. Well now, that kid is a full-blooded Cheyenne Indian; he's a grandson of old Stick-in-the-mud who was in the Custer scrap. You've heard of that old geezer, haven't you?

"Well, sir, that kid could call like a hawk and bring the hawk near enough so he could drop it with a stone—*absolutely*. Beaver Pete told me that when he found that kid in the trapping season he was wearing a bearskin from a bear he had caught and killed without so much as a bean-shooter. Nature couldn't freeze him or starve him. He could find water by instinct same as an animal does. You see, boys, what you *have* to do you can do. There is no such thing as scouting in the midst of civilization or in neighbor Smith's woods. Scouts are scouts because they *have* to be scouts; it isn't an outdoor sport. A scout is a fellow who has fought *because he had to fight* with nature and has won out. Scouts are silent people as a rule, I've met some of them. They're taciturn and si-

lent. The boy scouts are the noisiest bunch I ever met in my life."

The door at the end of the car opened and the voice of a trainman put an end to Mr. Wilde's talk.

"Emigrant. The next stop is Emigrant."

CHAPTER XXXVII

PARLOR SCOUTS

THE three winners of the Rotary Club award were not altogether cheered by the talk of their traveling acquaintance. They felt a trifle ashamed and dissatisfied with themselves. Here was a brisk, resourceful, adventurous man whose vocation seemed a very dream of romance. And he looked upon them as nice boys playing an interesting game. He did not take them seriously.

He regarded Shining Sun (or Stove Polish as he preferred to call him) as a rare discovery—a real, all around, dyed-in-the-wool, little scout, a scout whose skill and lore could be used in adventurous undertakings. Amateurs! Nice boys! And they were about to have their reward of merit for three exploits, the recital of which had not exactly staggered Mr. Wilde. They were going to drive around Yellowstone Park in autos and stop at the

hotels and visit modern, well-equipped camps, and see the petrified forests and the geysers.

And meanwhile an Indian boy was going into the unfrequented depths of the vast park to do for white men what they could not do for themselves. Descendent of savages though he was, and with the primitive vein persisting in him, they took him seriously, these men; he was a real little scout. Not a boy scout.

These were the thoughts, the reflections, of Westy Martin as he arose saying in a rather disheartened tone, "Come on, let's go out on the platform and watch the scenery."

The three boys staggered through the aisle of the car holding to the seat backs as the rushing train swerved in its winding course among the mountains. They had been but visitors in the smoking car and now in the one next it they came to their own seats, which at night had been transformed into berths.

On one of the seats lay a duffel bag containing the few camping utensils which they had brought against the unlikely prospect of a night's bivouac in the open. Westy was glad that they had not exposed these up-to-date devices to their acquaintance

in the next car. He might have commented flippantly on the collapsible or the folding frying pan. In a previous encounter with that Philistine of the smoking car he had inquired about the meaning of Westy's treasured pathfinder's badge, and had said that when he was a boy he had often played hares and hounds and hide-and-seek.

"Come on out in back," said Warde.

They staggered on through the train holding the backs of seats to steady their progress. All the passengers seemed weary, the cars littered and hot and stuffy. Discarded newspapers and magazines lay on the seats and floor. The passengers sprawled lazily in postures far from elegant. Only the train seemed wide-awake and bent upon some definite purpose. It roared and rattled and whistled and now and again a faint answering whistle was heard from the distant mountains as if the ghost of some locomotive long dead were concealed there.

In one of the cars a litter of sticky bits of tissue paper filled the aisle in company of an empty box which had contained somebody or other's fresh lemon-drops. Westy was not the scout to pass by such a litter, he had cleared up the luncheon rub-

bish after too many motoring parties for that. But he did not stoop to this worthy task of the scout now. He was not in the mood to be a menial, a housemaid scout; not with the exploits of Shining Sun so fresh in his mind. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself and he passed the litter by in proud disdain of it.

"Don't you be a lemon-drop scout," he said sneeringly to Warde, who was just behind him.

"How did you know I was going to stoop?" Warde asked.

Ah, that was the question. It was because Westy Martin was a better scout than he knew and like the true woodsman had eyes in the back of his head.

"I'm kind of sorry we didn't ask him if he'd let us go up in the forest with him," Warde said.

"A tall chance," said Westy disconsolately.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SOMETHING "REAL"

And so these three parlor scouts, winners of the Rotary Club award, reached the rear platform of the last car and gazed upon the landscape as it receded before their eyes. The whimsical Mr. Wilde had put them in bad sorts and the great, vast, stupendous west seemed to confirm all that their chance acquaintance had said.

How hopeless the lot of the lost wanderer here, how useless the good scout handbook, how futile all the pleasantly primitive devices to find one's way home—when home is just around the corner. They were just boys playing at scouting, nice boys, boy scouts. Well, at all events, it had won them this trip to the Yellowstone where there would be much to see. . . .

There was certainly not much to see at Emigrant. If there had ever been an Emigrant there it must have emigrated away, or been blown away as Mr. Wilde had said of other western stopping places.

Certainly there was no sign of life there. Yet evidently the place was useful to the railroad for the train stopped there, a visitation of life and energy in a scene of desolation.

Not a living soul was there to welcome them. Even the companionable noise of the train had ceased or died down to a slow pulsating sound of the locomotive. It seemed an impatient sound as if the steel brute were anxious to be on its way again. How lonesome, even forbidding the landscape looked from the cozy, little refuge where they viewed it. Only this little platform between them and the vast unknown.

Westy was a sensible, thoughtful boy and the bigness of the country impressed him. It affected his mood. What Mr. Wilde had said would probably not have been taken too seriously if Westy had been in the east. It was not Mr. Wilde alone, but the whole environment as well, which made all that Westy was and had accomplished paltry by comparison. It all seemed to belittle his scouting and make it infantile and ridiculous. Everything seemed to impart piquancy to Mr. Wilde's home truths. Here indeed was the land where men had fought with untamed Nature and won out.

It seemed to Westy that he had been swimming with a life preserver. He sat down on the car platform and rested his chin on his hands and gazed about. It was not a propitious mood for a boy to be in who was about to be shown the wonders of the Yellowstone National Park. He almost wished that he had not met that disturbing person, Mr. Wilde. He could not get Shining Sun out of his mind. To do anything on a *little* scale seemed contemptible to Westy. Was scouting after all a toy?

His two companions caught his mood though they were not as impressionable as he. They sat down on the platform beside him and the three made a rather disconsolate trio, considering that they were within a score or so of miles of their hearts' desire.

"I remind myself of Pee-wee, tracking a hop-toad," mused Westy.

Ed Carlisle took him up, "Just because Mr. Wilde says this and that——"

"Suppose he had gone to Scout Headquarters in New York for a scout to help them in the mountains," said Westy. "Would he have found one? When it comes to dead serious business——"

"Look what Roosevelt said about scouts," said Warde. "He said they were a lot of help and that scouting was a great thing, that's what he said."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Wilde that?" Ed asked.

"Because I didn't think of it," said Warde.

"Just because I get the Astronomy badge that doesn't prove I'm an astronomer," said Ed.

"Nobody says a scout's a doctor because he has the first aid badge," encouraged Warde.

Westy only looked straight ahead of him, his abstracted gaze fixed upon the wild, lonesome mountains. A great bird was soaring over them and he watched it till it became a mere speck. And meanwhile, the locomotive steamed at steady intervals like an impatient beast. Then, suddenly, its voice changed, there was strain and effort in its steaming.

"Guess we're going to go," said Warde. "Now for the little old Yellowstone, hey, Westy? Wake up, come out of that, you old grouch. Don't you know a scout is supposed to smile and look pleasant? We should worry about Mr. Madison C. Wilde."

"If we never did anything *real* and *big* it's because there weren't any of those things to do," said

Warde. "Didn't he say what you *have* to do, you do? That's just what he said."

Westy did not answer, only arose in a rather disgruntled way and stepped off the platform. He strolled forward alone along the outside of the car, kicking a stone as he went and watching it intently. When he raised his eyes he had almost reached the other end of the car. The car stood on a siding quite alone; the train was rushing away among the mountains.

Westy Martin was at last face to face with something real and big. He and his companions were quite alone in the Rocky Mountains. The Boy Scouts of America and the heedless, cruel, monster Nature had come to an issue at last.

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WESTY MARTIN IN THE YELLOWSTONE

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